

PC XBOX 360 GBA DS MOBILE PSP PLAYSTATION 2

SEPTEMBER 2006 VOLUME 9 ISSUE 6

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING COMPUTER GAMING & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

6-PAGE TITAN QUEST REVIEW! NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON PREVIEW

Spinter Cell: Double Agent • rAge 2006 blowout

Zalman Fatal1ty Champion Series Chassis

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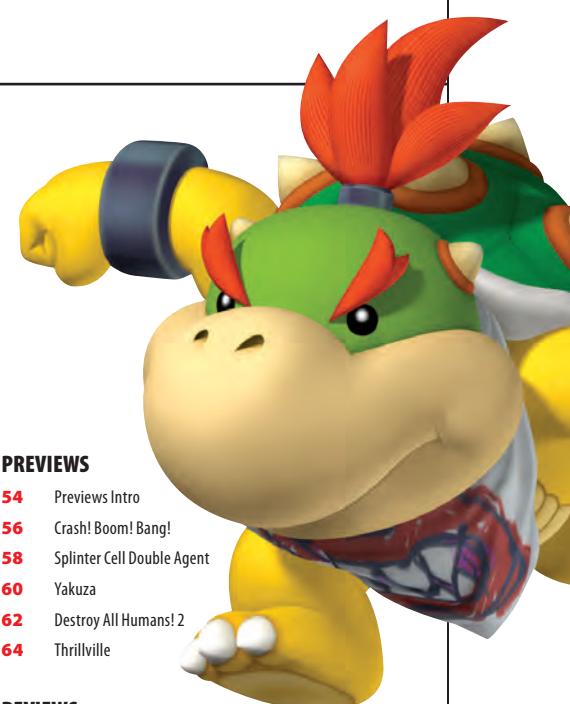
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- Gigabit LAN
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The end of July came with the news of a new E3. It was preceded, at first, with loads of cancellation reports, but I'll get back to that. This year and last year, I didn't go to E3. The first time taught me that you didn't need to be at E3 to cover it, while this year revealed to me how uninterested I really was in the very prospect of going. This might sound strange: working at a gaming magazine, but not caring much about the biggest show of them all. The problem is that the floors of E3 are just crammed with people who don't belong there. E3 is a Trade and Media expo, not a public event. The point was to let the press, business people, publishers, developers and others involved in the gaming industry get together and see what's happening in the next year.

Unfortunately, the high costs of putting up this show meant that it needed a large audience. This allowed almost anyone to get in, and before you knew it, there was a six-hour queue at the Nintendo booth. Publishers opted for closed-door sessions with the people they really wanted to talk to, and the stands, in terms of E3's point of view, were becoming rather expensive white elephants.

As such, the new E3 format is a positive and surprising step. Despite what a multitude of press sites and mags have and will be telling you, not a lot of people actually saw this coming. One second there was silence, the next we have experts crawling out of the woodwork.

I really detest this one thing about game journalism. It's partially the nature of the beast, though – NAG itself is probably guilty of poor press practices. However, there is a growing level of 'tabloidism' amongst game media. Two examples of highly inaccurate and speculative reporting appeared in July – the cancellation of E3 and Germany banning *Dead Rising*. Neither was true, but they spread like wildfire, and sites that I considered credible news sources were quick to tow the sensationalist line. That's disappointing. We are dealing with an industry that creates highly sophisticated and technically demanding entertainment. Film students are welcome to retort, but there is more involved in developing a game than making a movie. Yet, at the same time, the observer of this industry is riddled with fan banter disguised as actual journalism. I'm not laying claim that NAG is a sterling example of game journalism (though we are working on that), but we at least try to check our facts before publishing something. This practice isn't common with many game news outlets, which really degrades their writing to the level of gossip. I hope that as the market matures, so will its writers.

Former Blizzard developer Flagship was kind enough to fly one of us over to visit its studios in San Francisco to see *Hellgate* in action. Eight pages await your scrutiny on the game NAG staff members have casually started referring to as *Diablo III*. Meanwhile, *Titan Quest* is chewing up game time everywhere. It's funny, in the past few months since taking this job, I'm yet to get a letter complaining about no new games worth playing...

James Francis [Editor]



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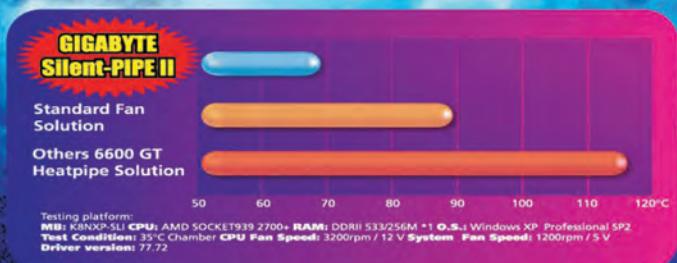


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Gigabyte GeForce 7800 GTX PCI-E Graphics Card
Gigabyte 19" TFT LCD
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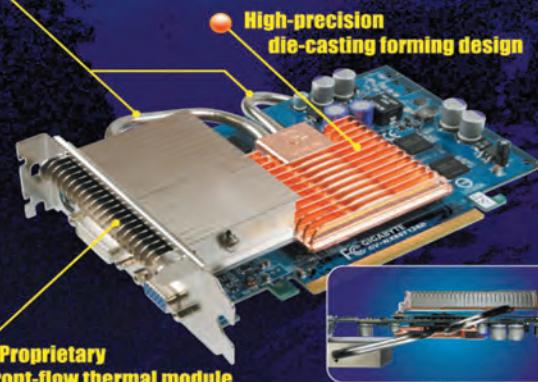
Silent-Pipe II Technology artfully uses the temperature difference between the inside and outside of chassis, creating a natural system convection.

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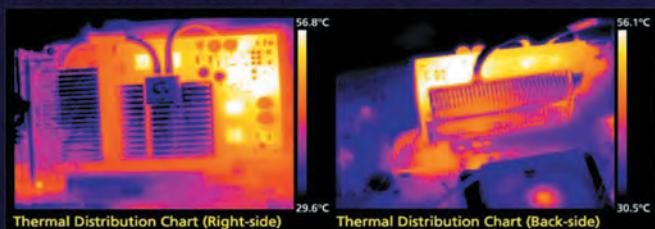
- Powered by NVIDIA GeForce 6600GT VPU
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- Supports PCI Express and 8 pipelines
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- Natural convection design
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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Hyslop

SUBJECT: Non-gaming people gaming

On the topic for August: Yes, people around me, who normally would not be considered gamers, are gaming more. On consoles. Consoles, in my opinion, really catch the eye of the public more easily than the PC does (not that I am a console fan - I more or less hate consoles). No idea why. Maybe it is because consoles have less of a technical side, and are better suited for the 'mainstream public'. Anyhow, consoles seem to be helping the gaming market grow larger.

This, however, is not an entirely good thing. There is always a chance - an almost nonexistent chance, but a chance nonetheless - that it could kill the PC market altogether, causing all the good games to be console-exclusive. While this may sound appealing to console-junkies, to PC-exclusive gamers like myself it would mark an apocalypse of sorts.

That said, however, consoles are certainly helping to bring more people into the gaming community, which may ultimately, among other benefits, lead to such events as RAge becoming more popular. We must hope, however, that consoles retain their popularity amongst the non-gamers.

It pains us to read this. Let us put something in perspective here: unless you count games like Pong and the really early

titles, the PC wasn't the original gaming platform. The Apple II was a powerful candidate, but it was preceded by consoles and definitely arcade. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, let's take things from where the PC rose to gaming prominence - the nineties. The x86 processor and 3D acceleration, respectively, heralded new eras of PC gaming. However, during these same eras, we also had the 3DO, NES, SNES, Jaguar, PlayStation, Genesis, Dreamcast and a few more. Consoles aren't growing the gaming market, they are the gaming market, one of which PCs are a part. But consoles and arcades have long been the dominating gaming platforms abroad, just not in South Africa. Thus, it's inaccurate to assume all or even most console gamers are mainstream players with little understanding of games. Actually, that's just downright arrogant, since the gaming pedigree and quality on consoles easily match what PCs produce, excluding the PC's more expensive advantage of upgrades. That said, a current-gen Xbox matches the performance of top-end gaming rigs with inferior hardware. Ponder that for a moment. PC gaming isn't likely to die, but if it does, why blame it on consoles? Do you blame the first athlete over the line for the guy behind him coming second? No, you don't. If PCs were to disappear into gaming history, however unlikely that is, you can't really knock consoles for it happening.



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

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Cyber mail: letters@nag.co.za
Important: Include your details when mailing us or how will you ever get your prize if you win...

TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH:

SiN and Steam seem to be causing many mixed feelings. What's your take on the topic?

FROM: Adam Smith

SUBJECT: DVD innovation

Just a thought: Could you possibly allow the movies on the Cover DVD to run in regular DVD players so that we can all bask in full surround sound game trailer goodness, in the comfort of our armchairs?

Great idea, but to do that means writing the DVD to two different standards. Essentially, PC users won't be able to access the files directly. It can also cause problems. Mixing two types of partition formats onto one disc won't fly well amongst the many different DVD drives NAG's readers use.

the whole point. That's how people get corrupted: it's like an easy way out. It's just like in real life. I'm not going to get into this cause. It'll take me days to explain the Force to one with such a low metachlorian count such as yourself, but in the end, the prophecy was fulfilled and Anakin Skywalker did bring balance to The Force by killing the Emperor. It's not possible for normal people to 'exile' the Jedi and Sith, dude, they've got powers beyond your comprehension.

If you'd like to continue this debate, I'll be more than glad to school you in the ways of The Force.



EVERY TIME A STAR WARS GAME IS MENTIONED, YOU SAY THAT ALL OF THEM ARE TERRIBLE, YET YOU ALWAYS GIVE THE GAMES BEING REVIEWED VERY HIGH SCORES

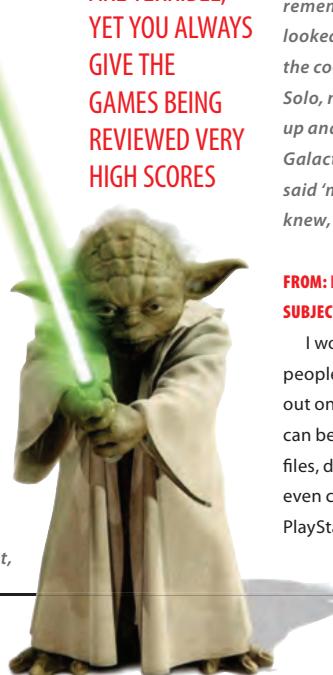
because if memory serves right, a Jedi master can also only have one apprentice (thus Liam Neeson's controversial decision to take Anakin on as a second apprentice). Therefore, either you are wrong or Yoda just got caught talking nonsensical gibberish to sound clever. Lastly, who cares how powerful the Jedi are? They were quickly annihilated when the clone armies turned on them, so a good citizen revolt will do a good job getting rid of all these citizens. Besides, if you nuke a Jedi, does he not evaporate like everyone else? If you intend on doing Jedi worship, folks, remember these two points: Grendel looked much cooler with a light sabre, and the coolest character in Star Wars, Han Solo, never had force powers. Just give it up and start watching the new Battlestar Galactica like the rest of us. By the way, if we said 'metachlorian' to the Star Wars fans we knew, they'd beat us savagely...

FROM: Carl Vaax

SUBJECT: Star Wars

I don't know how I overlooked this earlier, but I was paging through my May 2006 NAG issue... I refer to page 12 where you actually insulted Star Wars! Let me answer some of your questions. Firstly, when Yoda said, "always two there are... a master and an apprentice" in Episode 1, he meant that each master takes on an apprentice, so there could be any amount of Sith at any given time. The Sith got their asses kicked by the Jedi a few hundred years ago, so that's why there are only two at that point in time... because the others are dead (duh). Of course, the Dark Side's powers look better - that's

There have been many letters reacting towards our sober clarification of the Star Wars universe, but they were all really long and we didn't feel like editing down 2,000 words of Jedi glorydom to something that fits here. Yours is nice and small, so let's tackle the topic here. Firstly, if all the Sith got their asses kicked and there are actually only two left at the point of the movie, then the point stands: two Sith versus all those Jedi (duh). In other words, the Jedi still suck. Secondly, maybe someone can clarify Yoda's comment,



FROM: Leon du Plessis/Jedi Master Tyron
SUBJECT: Dumb Comments

I would like to know why, when most people have computers, most games come out on the PlayStation. I mean, a computer can be connected to the Internet, can store files, do research, do work, play games and even control a company, yet all the stupid PlayStation can do is play games. I don't

have a PlayStation nor do I have

the money to buy one, so I think Sony can shove its PlayStation. But the main reason I wrote this letter is to complain about your apparent lack of taste.

Every time a *Star Wars* game is mentioned, you say that all of them are terrible, yet you always give the games being reviewed very high scores, and said games are always praised. Here are some examples of the scores: *KOTOR 2* – 73; *Republic Commando* – 91; *Lego Star Wars* – 88.

And may I also point out that *KOTOR 1* won your own role-playing game of the year award. I personally own and have played all the above-mentioned games (also *Battlefront 2* and *Empire at War*). I know it may seem rude saying this to people whose job it is to review games, but you have to give credit where credit is due.

Brace yourself, because all this might knock you over. Firstly, many people have computers, but have you considered how many of those computers get upgraded often, and how many are even capable of running the latest games. In that sense, there are far more consoles in the market than gaming PCs. PC games only make up 10% of the market, so do the math. Secondly, every single Star Wars game you named was developed by a third-party developer. If you go pay careful attention to our Star Wars game bashing, we make a distinction between LucasArts internal and external games. Are you willing to tell us that most of the Episode 1 games were good?

FROM: Jared du Plessis
SUBJECT: PCs vs. Consoles

It seems that in this generation, PC users are labelled as 'geeks', 'nerds', etc, but no one seems to have a name to call console users. In fact, it seems as if people don't care if you play consoles and talk to your friends about it at school. However, if you are caught talking about anything to do with computers, then you are immediately labelled as an outcast.

People think there is a difference between the two, but there is a fine line between the two. Sure, you can do much more on computers than on consoles, but the gaming is the same except for the way you control it. I am a teenager and can't seem to understand why all my peers are like that. It makes me angry to see PC users mocked while console users (namely PS2) are often seen as 'cool'. I am really irritated by this, but don't want to say anything, as I

am afraid the same will fall on me. I am sure I am not the only one to encounter this, and would like my peers to wake up and think first before calling someone a 'geek' or 'loser' because they prefer PCs to consoles. *This isn't really anything new. PC users or people involved in tech have long been called these things. However, you should consider that consoles and PCs are quite different in terms of games. Calling them the same, but with a difference in input, means you should also add high-end cellphones to that list, since they can play games as well. A computer is more technically demanding. It requires driver updates, hardware upgrades, maintenance of the operating system, and a multitude of facets that intrigue the hardcore enthusiast. A console, in contrast, lets you simply pop in the game and pick up a controller. It's built specifically to play games, whereas a PC demands more from its user for proper performance. Inevitably, if you are part of the group who deals with the more technically demanding machine, people will call you names. That's because people have always done that. Just ignore it. Whether you are a geek or not doesn't influence how much fun you have playing games.*

FROM: PSFreak
SUBJECT: Does swearing in games \$%#& you off?

Does swearing upset me? Hell, no. That is why we are fortunate to have age restrictions on games and an icon on the cover to warn of strong language, sexual content or just plain old boring 'All ages'. Verbal abuse, vile language use or whichever form it comes in; there is no stopping the easily understandable context in which any type of message can be communicated. How many people who you know actually have a beef with vile language? How many people do you know who would stand their ground against their under-aged kids who would want to watch an age restricted movie or even playing a videogame?

I worked as a cinema manager for two years and can honestly tell from experience that parents have less of a clue than their own kids about age restrictions. Why are these age restrictions so important to our society? There are many answers to that question. The most important reason is to protect children from adult material.

Times are a changing, and the developers are trying to get away with



**AS AN ADULT,
WHO HAS
PLAYED GTA
SAN ANDREAS, I
FOUND IT QUITE
FUNNY AND
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THE WAY CJ
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SWEARING WITH
ALMOST EVERY
SENTENCE. I
UNDERSTOOD
THE CHARACTER
AND HIS
EMPHASIS ABOUT
HIS GANG LIFE**

more and more each time they produce a game. As an adult who has played *GTA San Andreas*, I found it quite funny and entertaining the way CJ would mix in swearing with almost every sentence. I understood the character and his emphasis about his gang life.

If you want to put a point across, throw in a swear word or ten thousand if you like. Say the same thing again, but censored, to a different person, and let's see who gets the message first. Do you think that *GTA San Andreas* would have sold so many copies if the swearing wasn't in it? I do not think so. Swearing has been around for longer than you and I have, and it will play the same role in our stuck-up society until the end of humanity.

The other side to the argument of swearing in games. Age restrictions are key, aren't they? Unfortunately, parents don't always pay attention to what their kids do. But then again; has there ever been a time when parents really paid attention to what their offspring got up to? If you ask us, it feels a little strange to play a violent and action-packed game, when the best the characters can deliver is "Damn!" and "Son of a..."

FROM: Killer 77
SUBJECT: Games based on movies

Why are there more movies to games than games to movies? I mean, movies to games are nothing compared to the actual movie and are so boring. *Tarzan* is a perfect example (back in the day when I was 7, I'm 12 now) it was so stupid, *King Kong* was cool when you played Jack but as Kong, the hairy *Prince of Persia* that gained 3000cm on his stomach, thighs and butt is so boring. But games to movies are cool. Check *Tomb Raider*, it was so awesome, it was the best movie I've seen (and it still is). I can't wait for the *Silent Hill* Movie. Hope I made a strong point.



**MOVIES TO
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*Maybe, but while you loved *Tomb Raider* there are quite a few people who really didn't like *Mario Bros.*, *Alone in the Dark*, *Wing Commander* and a few other really terrible game-related movies. On the flip-side, more and more gamers are enjoying license spin-offs because the developers actually started making good license games again. In fact, the most common complaint we heard about *King Kong* was that playing as Jack sucked; it was being Kong that was cool. NAG*

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WHAT'S MAKING NEWS
IN THE WORLD OF GAMES

TEST DRIVE TWICE THE PRICE IN EUROPE

Atari has decided to cut the price to \$40 in the US, but European gamers can expect to pay £50. [14]

PS3 FINALLY IN PRODUCTION

Sony expects one million units to be ready for launch and has sent development kits to game developers. [14]

NO DEAD RISING IN GERMANY?

The agency responsible for giving age restrictions to games in Germany has declined to rate Capcom's title, leading to speculation that the game will be banned. [15]

XBOX 360 NOT BIG IN JAPAN

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FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

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LOOKS GOOD IN SILVER

Renowned designer Andree Putman has created a pure silver faceplate for the 360. And it will only set you back €1,000. [18]

WII SPECS REVEALED

Nintendo is focusing on gameplay over graphics. [18]

AMD BUYS ATI

The CPU giant acquires the GPU leader. [20]

CALENDAR

What's happening and what you can buy this month. [22]

E3 RETHINKS ITS FORMAT

SHOW TO BE RENAMED E3 MEDIA FESTIVAL, SPREAD OUT ACROSS CITY

THE WORLD OF INTERACTIVE entertainment has changed since the E3 Expo was created 12 years ago. At that time, we were focused on establishing the industry and securing orders for the holiday season," said Douglas Lowenstein, President of the ESA, the trade association representing US computer and videogame publishers and the owner of E3 Expo. "Over the years, it has become clear that we needed a more intimate programme, including higher quality, more personal dialogue with the worldwide media, developers, retailers and other key industry audiences." In officially announcing the new E3 to the world, the ESA made sure something is clear: this was inevitable. In the last week of July, a rumour made the rounds that E3 had been cancelled, due to the large publishers

withdrawing from the event. The reason was exposure: for all the flash and noise, the show doesn't create as much buzz as it should. The show is popular and saw over 60,000 visitors through the door this year. But the impact wasn't there. The news of the cancellation spread quickly, and a lot of gaming sites ran with it.

Of course, a cancellation isn't true. The show is profitable and simply closing doors was unlikely. But several sites countered the rumour. Ars Technica spoke to an ESA source and established that the expo is changing its approach. The problem has been that even though E3 packed its halls, the show became a show-in-a-show. Even though it is supposed to be a trade show, journalists, vendors, business people and



other professionals experienced larger and larger crowds that made working there very taxing. The ideal way has become to arrange for closed-door meetings, and publishers found that they had a stand for the sake of a stand.

As such, the new E3 format will work a bit differently. The show will still take place in LA, described as a close partner by the ESA. The expo generates around \$50 million of revenue for the city. But the show is unlikely to reappear at the LA convention centre. Instead, meetings and shows will be held in venues across the city. This certainly ups the exclusivity and control the publishers can maintain. It will also be renamed to the E3 Media Festival. While E3 has become more and more accessible to the general public, the events Microsoft, Sony, Nintendo and various publishers hold in the days before E3 have become harder to access.

The decision has the unanimous backing of the ESA board and also favours the outlook of the big publishers who have spent a lot of money on stands. "It is no longer necessary or efficient to have a single industry 'mega-show,'" Lowenstein said in the statement. "By refocusing on a highly-targeted event, we think we can do a better job serving our members and the industry as a whole, and our members are energised about creating this new E3."

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SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

SCI/Eidos has signed a deal with Funcom to handle the boxed side of publishing **Conan: Hyborian Adventures**, the upcoming MMO based on the books and movies. Funcom will handle digital distribution.



PSP games go platinum. **Sony** has launched a series of top games for the platform under the Greatest Hits brand. These top sellers retail for \$19.99.

Battle for Middle-earth II fans rejoice: sources at EA have revealed that the company is working on an expansion for the game, apparently called **The Rise of the Witch King**.



THQ has cancelled **WWE Smackdown! vs. Raw 2007** for the PlayStation 3. The company said the PS3 version was too far behind other platform versions and resources would be reallocated to support these instead.

EA has announced that **The Godfather** will be released on the 360 soon.



TEST DRIVE WILL COST EUROPEAN GAMERS TWICE AS MUCH

EUROPEAN AND LOCAL GAMERS looking forward to playing *Test Drive Unlimited* might be expected to pay twice the price for the game than their US counterparts do. Atari, the game's publisher, recently decided to cut the price the game would retail at in the States, taking it down to \$40. However, European gamers can expect to pay the normal price of £50. Converted at current exchange rates, this is almost \$93 – more than double the price. Atari explained that the price difference is due to 360 and HDTV penetration in America.

"The US and Europe are very different markets in terms of the penetration of Xbox 360 and HDTV," Bruno Bonnell, Atari's CEO, told MCV. "The US is much more advanced than Europe, so we believe the time is right to introduce a lower price point. This is why we have chosen to be aggressive. But we won't do that in Europe."

Another reason cited by another Atari employee is that there are far more US players on 360 Live. Online support is a major component of the game and its popularity. Players will be able to purchase more cars and other add-ons on the Live Marketplace. European gamers are unlikely to look at the difference favourably, but Atari is sticking to its guns. "I don't see it as a problem," Bonnell said. "In other markets, prices vary from territory to territory. We shouldn't expect to be any different in this industry."

Recently, Atari, as part of streamlining its operations, also sold off the *Driver* franchise, along with developer Reflections. The company said it wanted to focus more on the *Test Drive* series, which has been lagging far behind competitors *Need for Speed* and *Gran Turismo*.



PS3 MANUFACTURING STARTS, DEV KITS SHIP

AFTER A LOT OF negative press, the PlayStation 3 seems to finally be on the move, leaving behind at least some speculation of whether the console would be able to compete against the Wii and Xbox 360, let alone retain the top spot held by its predecessor, the PlayStation 2. According to a Chinese business newspaper, the company responsible for manufacturing the expensive console has already been assembling the machine since the beginning of July, and had shipped 200,000 units to Sony at the end of that month. The PS3 comprises 1,700 parts, slightly more than the Xbox 360, and includes a very high-priced Blu-Ray drive. In the past few months, analysts have started to doubt whether Sony would be able to manufacture enough units in time for a worldwide launch, and rumours suggested that there would be severe shortages. If production has already begun at the reported rate, then Sony will have at least a million units ready by November. However, this still won't be enough, as Microsoft learned with the 360 launch late last year.

The second piece of good news comes from Gamespot, which reports that over 10,000 development units have been sent to 208 developers across the globe. This is significantly earlier than the arrival of 360 dev kits prior to launch. So far, demonstrated PlayStation 3 titles have failed to capture the public's attention, especially because they were far lower in quality than the original promotional videos. While some developers have already had kits for a while, this news means that more companies might be able to have games ready at or soon after the console's launch.

Meanwhile, Epic's Mark Rein is very positive on the console's future success. "I think Sony's in a good spot with the PlayStation 3," Rein told Gamasutra adding, "I know we're getting some great results with it back at our house, so I expect other developers would be as well."

PLAYSTATION® 3

November 2006 ...





DEAD RISING BANNED IN GERMANY?

THE INTERNET HAS BEEN abuzz with news that Germany has banned *Dead Rising*, Capcom's free-roaming zombie gore-fest for the 360. The country is known for banning games or elements in games. But the reports turned out to be inaccurate, exposing the problem with push-button game news reporting online.

The game was not awarded a rating by the Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle (USK), the agency responsible for giving games in Germany age restrictions. In the case of a country such as Australia, the lack of an age rating would mean the game can't be retailed, but in Germany this simply means the game can only be sold to people over the age of 18 – suitable, considering *Dead Rising*'s content. The game could later be 'indexed', which would prohibit publisher Capcom from advertising the title, but this isn't the case yet. The decision lies with another rating body that aims to protect the youth of Germany.

In the past, Germany has also refused to give ratings to *Condemned*, *God of War* and *Resident Evil 4*. The games were re-awarded later on and were available in Germany regardless. The main reason for their low prominence was that publishers were unable to advertise them and decided not to put too much stock in German sales for these games.

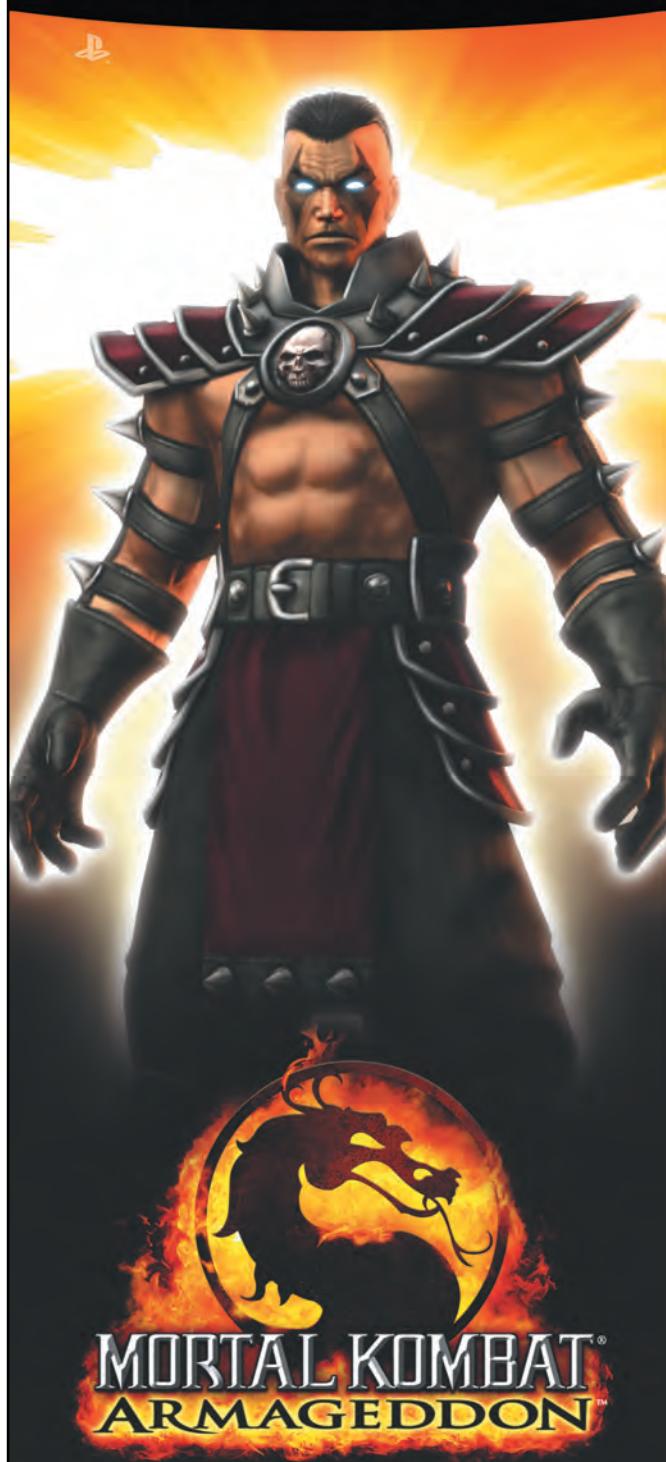


DEAD RISING DEMO ON XBOX LIVE SOON

CAPCOM HAS UNVEILED AN 8 September release date for the upcoming Xbox 360-exclusive zombie-holocaust simulator, *Dead Rising*. Also part of the news is that a *Dead Rising* demo will be hitting Xbox Live 'soon'. *Dead Rising* sees the player being a wartime photojournalist caught in a mall, during a zombie holocaust. Inside, the player has 72 hours to entertain himself or herself, survive the zombies and, from the look of videos and screenshots, have a damn good time doing it.

The game boasts huge arrays of zombies spanning as far as the camera can see in the distance, along with an obscene amount of items that can be picked up and used in the Mall. For all intents and purposes, *Dead Rising* is the de facto zombie simulator, complete with Lego-heads.

PlayStation®2



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TEN REASONS WHY E3 HAS BEEN CHANGED

THE ESA ANNOUNCED THAT E3 2007 would undergo a major change, due to various problems that the Electronics Entertainment Expo has faced.

GameDaily and various other Websites had the top ten reasons why E3 was 'cancelled' and is now 'redesigned':

1. Poor return of investment for game developers.
2. Nintendo, Microsoft, Sony and Electronic Arts pulled out after complaining about there not being enough of a return on investment.
3. Game coverage takes place around the clock, thanks to Websites such as *Joystiq*, *YouTube*.
4. Publishers have found that 'winning' E3 doesn't do anything for business - the popularity of your products at E3 contributes nothing to their success.
5. Publishers have started sponsoring their own events.
6. Common sense (see 1)
7. The Internet has proven to be much faster than any news conference, no matter how exclusive.
8. High costs involved as well as obscenely priced food.
9. The herculean effort involved in setting something like E3 up.
10. Various studies indicate that people prefer smaller, intimate exhibitions.

XBOX 360 STRONGER THAN EVER, BUT IT'S NOT BIG IN JAPAN

THE XBOX 360 IS powering ahead and is enjoying a sizable time lead over competitor Sony. This translates into record sales, but supply shortages hampered even larger volumes to hit the market. Still, Robbie Bach, President of the Entertainment & Devices division, revealed at Microsoft's Financial Analyst meeting at the end of June that the company's gaming division will be back in profitability by 2008. Speaking at the event, Bach explained the '06 fiscal losses were due to the transition from the Xbox to the 360, but regarded this as temporary. "We [expect] making tremendous progress in fiscal year '07. We don't think the gaming business as a whole will get to profitability, but we do think it will get to profitability [during] fiscal year '08."

Console manufacturers sell their hardware at a loss and recoup money from game royalty fees. To date, only Nintendo has managed to make a profit on one of its set-top consoles, the GameCube. Bach's predictions include the software sales, as the expensive 360 isn't expected to make a hardware profit any time soon – if at all. Sony recently revealed that the PlayStation 3's development costs would take around five years to recoup. But Microsoft is used to taking a financial knock for its consoles – this tactic ensured a footprint for the Xbox and helped taking market share from Sony. Flextronics, the world's largest contract electronics manufacturer, also announced a six percent increase in its most recent fiscal quarter. The company is responsible for manufacturing Xbox 360 hardware, but it also manufactures products for companies such as HP and Sony-Ericsson. Meanwhile, Live, Microsoft's online service for its consoles, is going from strength to strength. Recently, the company reported that 60% of 360 owners use Live, a huge leap from the ten percent of Xbox owners who did the same.



Microsoft didn't clarify, though, what percentage of these users use the free Silver service. With games such as *Gears of War* and the monolithic *Halo 3* on their way, not to mention successes in Live Arcade, the service is set to keep flourishing.

But it's not all milk and honey in the 360's arena. Japan still remains an unfavourable market. In the last week of June, the console only sold 1,897 units in the country, much less than the PlayStation 2's 23,133. The technically abandoned GameCube came in at third place with 1,002 units.

"Globally we are doing very well, but Japan has always been tough," said Darren Huston, president and chief executive officer of Microsoft's Japan unit. "We launched early and with not enough Japan-specific content."

"In the end of March and April through June we've had many good titles coming out," said Huston. "RPGs are one of the biggest game segments in the market [in Japan], but it's taking a lot of investment to [develop] large-scale RPGs."

FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

TREMULOUS

URL: www.tremulous.net

GENRE: FPS/RTS

SIZE: 95.6MB (on the cover DVD)

INSPIRED BY THE SAME roots as the Natural Selection mod for *Half-Life*, namely a mod called Gloom for *Quake II*, *Tremulous* is a free open source team-based FPS with some liberal RTS. Choosing between aliens and humans, players on both sides can build working structures in-game. These structures (the game features 16) provide spawning locations and other important functions, such as base defence, healing and more.

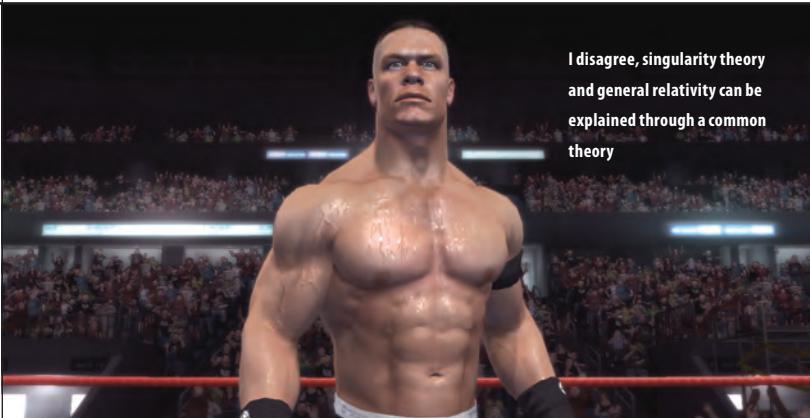
Depending on what side you're on, you advance differently. Human players are rewarded with credits for each kill, which can be used to buy new weapons or upgrades from the Armoury. The alien team, however, upon killing a human, is allowed to evolve into a new class. The more kills gained, the more powerful classes are available.

The overall objective behind the game is to take out the other team. You can only do this by removing their ability to respawn, by attacking their spawn structures. You can run along the walls and ceilings as an alien, while the humans can swap out weapons from a large choice of ordinance.

Tremulous unfortunately doesn't support bots, so you'll have to play it with friends.



Tremulous adds RTS elements to the first-person shooter genre



I disagree, singularity theory and general relativity can be explained through a common theory

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

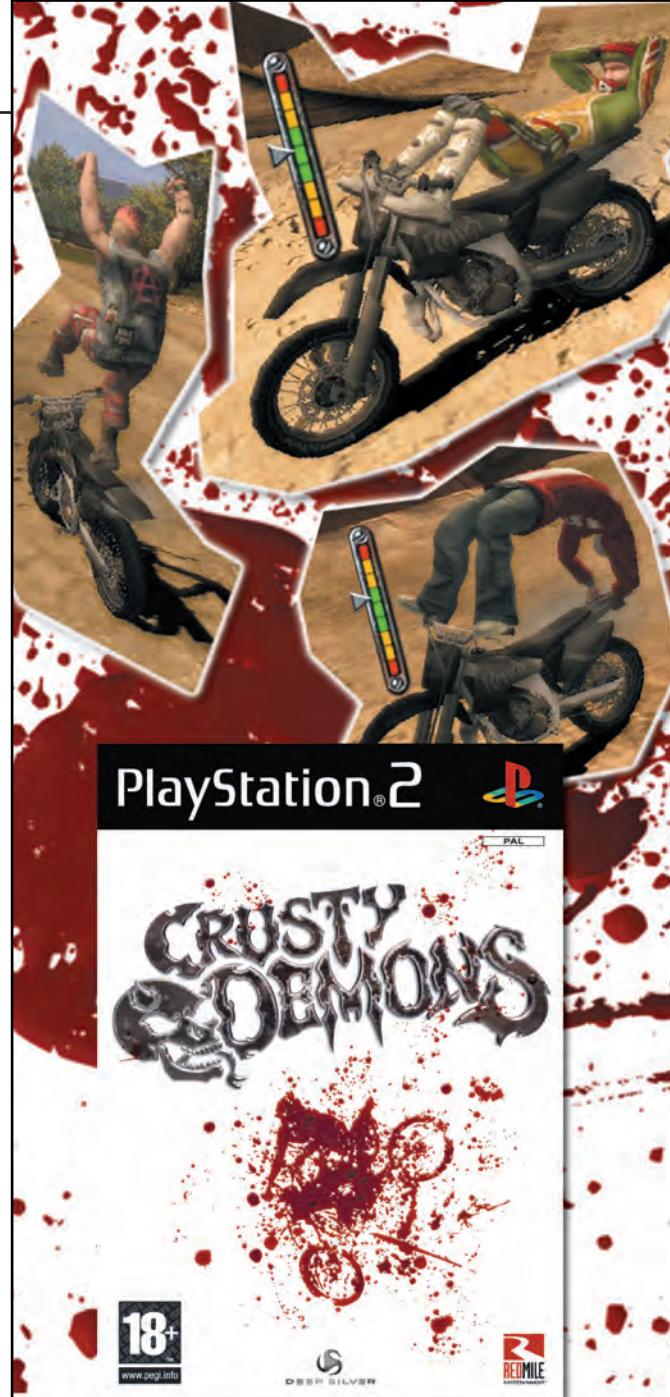
AS ALWAYS, PUBLISHERS ARE busy moving and shaking their release schedules as games appear, disappear or are expanded. In case you're a fan of Tony Soprano and his larger mob family, you might be sad to hear that *The Sopranos* for the 360 has been cancelled. The game will still be released on the PS2, but apparently there wasn't enough difference between the versions to justify a next-gen version. The game is taking the same approach as other mob-themed games, *The Godfather* and *Scarface*, with an open-world approach where you build your criminal mob empire while a larger tale unfolds in the background.

Scarface also featured in the news. Vivendi announced the PSP version of the game, which will be different to the console title. So much so, in fact, that it has a different name. *Scarface: Money. Power. Respect* will combine turn-based strategy closely with real-time combat. Mirroring the movie's plot, players will try and take over turf in Miami. The game will also feature ad hoc multiplayer. The World is Yours has been confirmed for PS2, Xbox and the PC - unfortunately Vivendi announced that there won't be a 360 version.

Meanwhile, the first major license casualty has happened in the console turf wars. THQ has cancelled its PlayStation 3 version of *WWE: Smackdown! vs. Raw 2007*. The reason was that the PS3 version was too far behind in development compared to other versions. So far, only working builds of the 360 version have been shown. *Unreal Tournament 2007* is still heading to the PlayStation 3, but Epic has admitted that it will only appear in early 2007. That means it won't be a launch title, leaving room for a killer app action shooter on the PS3's launch list. Meanwhile, if you loved the PS2 cult classic *Rez*, there's hope for a sequel. Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the game's creator, advised gamers to keep their ears open when asked about a sequel in a recent interview. He also made similar remarks at E3 this year. Meanwhile, Crytek, the developer of *Far Cry*, has added a job listing for PS3 programmers. This might indicate that the developer is planning a PS3 port of *Crysis*.

The people who brought us *Hitman* and *Freedom Fighters* are working on a, so far, 360 exclusive. Details are scant around IO Interactive and Eidos' *Lynch & Kane*, other than it will involve lots of gunplay, a gritty backdrop and looks pretty good.

Finally, Russian developer Buka announced another machine killer for the PC. *Collapse* will be an action title based at the end of this century. Monsters and aliens have ravaged humanity, and a group of elite fighters emerge with swords and guns to sort out things. As you'd expect, it looks pretty good. Unfortunately, it's slated for an end of 2007 release and we'll have to wait and see if time will treat the development kindly or if it will appear dated.



Crusty Demons

The Crusty Demons are a gang of bikers who tour the world performing outrageous bike stunts and participating in all manner of crazy skits with motorised vehicles. In a pact with the Devil, they are offered immortality - the ability to crash time and time again, yet still live to walk away - at the cost of signing over their souls. Only by winning the "damnation game" and entertaining Lucifer do they have a chance to win back their souls...

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**LOST & FOUND**

Every month in honour of our favourite TV show, *Lost*, we'll hide the Dharma Initiative logo somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [Dharma September]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a prize from our friends at HomeTheatrePC.co.za.

LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Mark Grieves, p47



MAKE MINE A SILVER 360

GEETING A UNIQUE FACEPLATE for your 360 has just become a topic of high exclusivity. Renowned interior designer Andree Putman has designed an exclusive faceplate made from silver. It will be crafted by the very exclusive Christofle, which has been making silver trinkets since 1830. The faceplate will be available in Christofle's Paris boutique by the end of the year, but you might want to line up now as only five are being made. The faceplate will also set one back around €1,000, making it nearly three times as expensive as the console it will be placed on.

The faceplate design frenzy doesn't stop there, though. Designers like Karl Lagerfeld, Sonia Rykiel and Chanel have also created faceplate designs that retail for \$400 and up.



NINTENDO WII SPECS REVEALED

INFORMATION ON THE WII'S hardware has leaked to the public. Much like Nintendo has been saying, it seems like a minor evolution of the GameCube design. Nintendo seems to be focusing more on low cost and gameplay innovations via its new motion-sensitive controller than graphics muscle. The Wii will not support HDTV by default; it uses a standard analogue-only AV jack.

The CPU, called Broadway, runs at 729MHz. It has a 243MHz memory bus to the 64MB of GDDR3 that is the Wii's common memory pool. This makes it roughly 50% faster than the GameCube's Gekko CPU at 485MHz. Broadway is supposedly backwards compatible, so GameCube games can run without emulation.

The GPU is called Hollywood, and consists of a 243MHz core with 3MB of integrated memory and 24MB of high-speed graphics memory at 486MHz. It also includes audio functions, and like the CPU is hardware compatible with its GameCube counterpart. On average, it is estimated that Hollywood will be also about 50% faster than the GC's graphics chip.

Other features of the system include an optical drive that reads both 4.7GB single-sided and 8.5GB double-sided 12cm discs, as well as GameCube discs with a maximum speed of about 6x DVD. There's 512MB onboard flash memory for storing savegames and downloads, which is non-removable. The Wii also includes an SD card slot, four GameCube controller ports, two GameCube memory card slots, two USB 2.0 ports, and a built-in wireless LAN adapter.



CAPTION OF THE MONTH

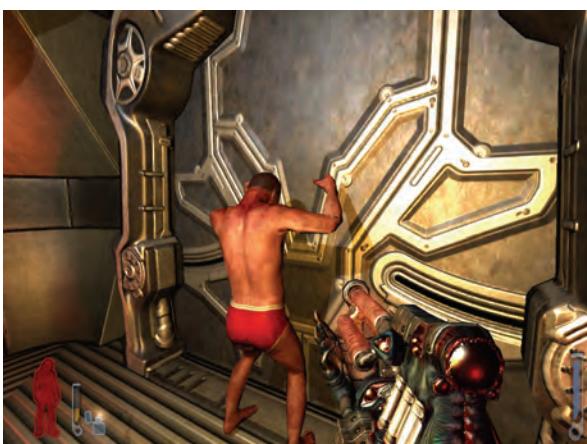
EVERY MONTH WE'LL CHOOSE a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject [September Caption].



SEPTEMBER CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:

"You want camel? I sell you camel! Very good camel!
You want know what price?
Very good price! Egyptian
price! Friend price! You
want buy papyrus?"



AUGUST WINNER

"Let me in, Let me in...
there's a guy with a gun
and a bottle of champagne
out here and I'm half
naked!"

— Matthew Lowry

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!

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BIOSHOCK DEVELOPER UNHAPPY WITH EA

KEN LEVINE, HEAD OF Irrational Games, revealed that one of the reasons there was (initially) no *System Shock 3*, was that "EA just didn't give a s*** about that game." Levine had assembled a story design, but was not that keen on following through with EA, he told *PC Gamer US*.

"I think if EA were to do it, it would've been just a regular first-person shooter with a boss monster at the end." That's because they "didn't see it as a big brand" - something that, conveniently enough, new publishing pals 2K Games did. "We have a publisher who cares about this game, and they believe in this kind of game," Levine continued, switching his attention back to *BioShock*.

"2K Games is the company that helped reinvigorate *Elder Scrolls* and *Civilization*. They believe in core games." *BioShock* is due out (undefined date) on PC and Xbox 360. EA's own effort, *System Shock 3*, does not have a release date yet.



Enchanted Arms

Escape to a fantasy world filled with beautiful cinematic-quality graphics, unique characters and bizarre creatures. Take on the role of Atsuma, Enchanter in-training and transform from a naïve student into the most powerful saviour in a war 1000 years in the making. Immerse yourself in a deep storyline as you face increasingly difficult challenges and learn to master Atsuma's special fighting and magical abilities.

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AMD BUYS ATI

AM HAS ACTUALLY DONE it. It has acquired ATI! News of this bold move reached our ears during Computex, but we didn't believe it back then. It seemed like a risky move, for a company with a market capitalisation of around \$9bn to up and acquire a company worth \$6.4bn, but this is precisely what it did.

We were also slightly uncertain about potential synergy between the two organisations, and the seemingly strong bonds between ATI and Intel, as well as between NVIDIA and AMD, seemed to rule such a move out. However, after listening to the global press conference held on the day of this announcement, it's clear that both organisations have clear visions for the future of the new Green and Red entity.



NCsoft has announced that **Auto Assault** will be receiving a big free update soon. Apart from addressing game issues, the update will also put new areas and buildings into the wastelands, as well as new missions and more.

Left Behind Games has appointed Jerome Mikulich to market Left Behind to Christian audiences. Mikulich has had a lot of success marketing music to churches and other religious organisations.

NVIDIA'S CEO TALKS GRAPHICS, CONSOLES AND THE FUTURE

GAME JOURNALIST DEAN TAKAHASHI interviewed NVIDIA's CEO, Jen-Hsun Huang, about the graphics manufacturer's current role, its relationship with Sony and the PlayStation 3, and the future of gaming graphics. When asked if growth in graphics is enough, Huang stated that the immediate future is still clear. "Graphics processing is more important in all of these digital devices. As the number of digital devices explodes, we find ourselves relevant in a lot of new markets that we were never part of before." One example of this is the company's expansion into the console arena. The company originally developed the chipset for the original Xbox, but with the next-generation, NVIDIA is supporting the PlayStation 3. When asked why, Huang explained that it doesn't work to develop chips for different consoles.

"You can't build chips for all the game consoles. That's not possible. They would all like a slightly different style from the others. Difference is important. The same chip company would have difficulty designing chips for the different styles. It's also such high stakes that you need to focus." He added that NVIDIA didn't choose its partner as much as Sony approached them. Huang has a lot of faith in the console, commenting that the inclusion of the Blu-Ray drive was a smart move. "The first PlayStation had a CD-ROM drive. The PlayStation 2 had DVD. It makes no sense for the PlayStation 3 to use DVDs. To postpone it by a few months so they could include Blu-Ray was a masterstroke. When that comes out, it's going to look so much more advanced than last-generation game consoles."

He added that it was inevitable that the company would work on consoles. The company spends \$750 million a year on research and development, which means it has to look forward and enter industries that suit its business. Huang made mention of NVIDIA's expansion onto cellphones, saying that when the PC came out, no one understood why you would want an expensive typewriter. Nevertheless, the hardware has evolved and the same is happening to cellular phones.

He was also asked the big question: how far are games from photo-realistic graphics?

"We are a good solid 10 years away from photorealism. In the next several years, we will still just be learning to do the basics of film, like motion blur, depth of field - all of that stuff alone chews up a lot of graphics processing. [But] articulating a human form and human animation, the subtleties of humans and nature, are still quite [far] away for us."

LATEST ASUS GRAPHICS CARDS INCORPORATE HDMI

WITH THE RISING DEMANDS on home theatre PCs, audio and video performance has become more critical than ever before. The new Asus graphics cards incorporate the advanced HDMI interface to support future devices with HD A/V interfaces. HDMI combines high-definition audio/video signals into one single cable, and is 100% digital. SP conversion from a digital source is not necessary, guaranteeing the best sound and visual quality.

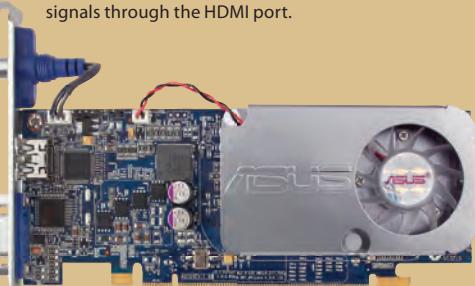
The Asus offerings add Splendid Video Intelligence Technology, which enables vibrant visual representations in any lighting conditions optimised for the human eye. Splendid works on top of NVIDIA's PureVideo technology and ATI's AVIVO technology to deliver the highest quality decoded video stream.

Splendid detects activation and usage of video applications and automatically optimises image quality for the best visual results. It further provides five modes (standard, game, theatre, scenery and night) and three skin tone options for various video applications.



EN7600GT/HTDI/256MB

The Asus EN7600GT/HTDI/256MB is based on the NVIDIA GeForce 7600 GT GPU. It provides DVI, HDMI, and an S-Video connector, and bundles an HDMI to DVI adapter to offer a dual-DVI output option for those who don't need the HDMI interface, although it does seem a bit silly to buy an HDMI-enabled card and then never use the functionality. The graphics card comes with an S/PDIF optical cable and S/PDIF-in, which connects to the motherboard's S/PDIF-out to combine audio and video signals through the HDMI port.



EAX1600PRO/I/256MB

The EAX1600PRO/I/256MB is powered by the ATI X1600 PRO VPU. Its low profile design makes this offering ideal for the more compact modern home theatre PC. This card has also adopted S/PDIF-in for receiving digital audio to combine with high-definition video signals through the HDMI output port.

CHARTS

PC GAMES

#	Title
1	Sims 2: Family Fun Stuff
2	Sims 2: Open For Business
3	Sims 2
4	CSI 3: Dimensions Of Murder
5	Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War
6	Sims Deluxe Edition Classics
7	Need For Speed: Underground 2 Classics
8	Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends
9	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter
10	Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle Earth Classics
11	Cars
12	Half-Life 2 - Episode 1
13	FIFA World Cup 2006 Germany
14	Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004
15	Devil May Cry Special Edition

PLAYSTATION 2

#	Title
1	Gran Turismo 4 Platinum
2	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
3	Burnout 3 Takedown Platinum
4	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
5	Tourist Trophy
6	Cars
7	Rugby 2006
8	Moto GP 4 Platinum
9	FIFA World Cup 2006 Germany
10	Need For Speed: Underground Platinum
11	Over The Hedge
12	God Of War Platinum
13	Tomb Raider: Legend
14	FIFA Street 2
15	Singstar Rocks

PSP

#	Title
1	Tomb Raider: Legend
2	Cars
3	FIFA World Cup 2006 Germany
4	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
5	Need For Speed: Underground Rivals
6	Daxter
7	Desperately Sexy Housewives (Adult Movie)
8	Medievil Resurrection Platinum
9	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2006
12	FIFA 2006
11	FIFA Street 2
10	Pirates Of The Caribbean - Legend Of Jack Sparrow
13	Metal Gear Acid 2
14	Pink Paradise - Table Dance & Strip Tease
15	Loco Roco



Webcams are certainly becoming more advanced. **Logitech** unveiled its **QuickCam Ultra Vision**, a Webcam that boasts not only a superior lens and better lens control, but also a lower F-stop setting to get more light into the camera. You'll still need to keep the light on, but at least you won't look like an ID photo onscreen.

Corex has launched the **Hardcase 12SE Intelligent Fan Controller** locally. This module from Thermaltake has four channels for fans, which can be adjusted individually, or left to the control of the module, which adjusts individual fan speeds according to the box's temperature.

Adaptec has quietly killed its USB2 to SCSI adapter, relegating support for external SCSI drives from its line to the dead hardware pile.



Foxconn's effort to expand into the South African market is bearing fruit. The company recently announced a 100% sales increase in the market compared to previous years' figures.

The **AOpen i975Xa-YDG** motherboard has been released locally. The board has been collecting awards since its release in Europe and Asia, and boasts Intel 975 chipset features along MoDT technology.

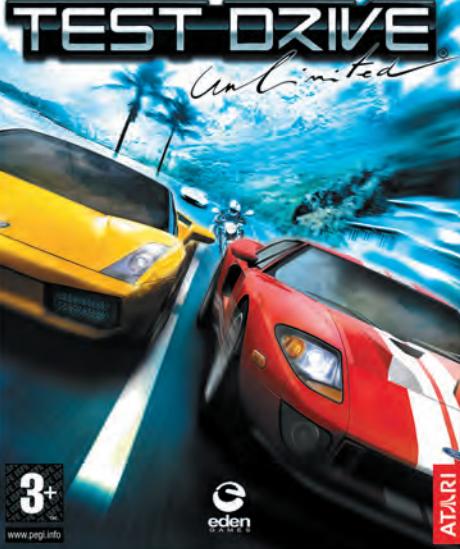


The UK's Association for Chief Police Officer has slammed upcoming title **Reservoir Dogs** for glorifying violence against police. However, we suppose you could say the same for the movie the game is based on. Clowns to the left, Jokers to the right...

Rockstar has listened to fans' complaints about **Liberty City Stories**, which the developer says was a "... rookie first-gen PSP title compared to VCS." The game will be bigger than the original Vice City and, for one, your character can swim again.






TEST DRIVE *Unlimited*




eden


Test Drive Unlimited

This is the ultimate automotive experience for car and bike enthusiasts alike whether they play through the game on or offline. In-game, players can visit the most sophisticated car and bike dealers to look at and purchase new vehicles or simply take them for a test spin. Players can then participate in 8 player races on or offline and take any of their vehicles for a cruise around more than 1000 miles of diverse Hawaiian roads.

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XBOX 360

ATARI



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CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER



11

RELEASE: Lego Star Wars 2 : The Original Trilogy (PS2, PSP) Date TBA ▼

RELEASE: Faces of War (PC) Date TBA

RELEASE: Settlers 2: 10th Anniversary Gold Edition (PC) Date TBA

RELEASE: Resident Evil 4 (PC) Date TBA

RELEASE: The Hustle: Detroit Streets (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Jaws Unlimited (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Dance Factory (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Samuri Warriors: State of War (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Atilier Iris 2 (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Disgaea 2 (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Super Bikes: Riding Challenge (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Global Defence Force (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: All Star Fighters (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Dragon Sister (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Zombie Hunters (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Party Carnival (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Zombie Virus (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Passport to... (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Infected (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Ultimate Ghost N Goblin (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Pocket Racers (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Ys of Naphishtim (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Street Supremacy (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Gradius Collection (1-4) (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: PQ (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Gitaroo Man Lives (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Dynasty Warriors Volume 2 (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Stronghold Legends (PC) Date TBA



26

RELEASE: FIFA 2007 (PS2, PSP)
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27

RELEASE: Def Jam: Fight for New York (PSP)





1

RELEASE: Joint Task Force (PC) ►

RELEASE: Timeshift (PC) ◀



7

RELEASE: Monster House (PS2)

8

RELEASE: Timeshift (360)

RELEASE: Crusty Demons (PS2)

RELEASE: Age of Pirates: Caribbean Tales (PC) ▼

9/10

LAN: Mayhem Open Lan (www.langames.co.za) Aug. 9

ON THIS DAY: Sept. 10, 1987: Yumeiko Doki Doki Panic was released for the Famicom Disk System in Japan - later known as America's Super Mario Bros. 2

14

RELEASE: The Godfather: The Game (PSP, 360)

RELEASE: Gangs of London (PSP)



16/17

ON THIS DAY: Sept. 16, 1998: Clifffy B (Epic Megagames) opens the Cat-Scan contest. "This contest will feature cat-loving owners across the world holding their felines on their flatbed scanners in the name of ART."

21

RELEASE: Superman Returns (PS2, PSP, 360)

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RELEASE: The Ant Bully (PS2, PC)

RELEASE: SpyHunter: Nowhere to Run (PS2)

RELEASE: Tekken Dark Resurrection (PSP)

RELEASE: WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2006 Platinum (PSP)

22

RELEASE: Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007 (PC, PS2)

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RELEASE: 50 Cent: Bulletproof: G-Unit Edition (PSP)

23/24

EVENT: International Science Show

Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg Sept. 24 - 27

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28

RELEASE: Enchanted Arms (360)

RELEASE: Test Drive Unlimited (360)

RELEASE: Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy (PC, 360)

RELEASE: Prey (360)

29

EVENT: rAge (www.rageexpo.co.za)

Coca-Cola Dome, Johannesburg Sept. 29 - Oct 1

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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS ONLINE LIFE

By Miktar Dracon

OH, HI! YOU'RE BACK again. Sucker for punishment, eh? Ah well, c'mon in and let's see what I have lying around. I think there's a bag of peanuts on the shelf there, help yourself. Don't mess on the couch, I just cleaned it.

Let's see – I hadn't really planned for your arrival, so I'll just have to make this up as I go along. Try to call next time, or at least send a pigeon with a little note attached to its leg informing me that the Huns are at the door.

Lately there has been a lot of discussion (but not limited to) in the (un)official NAG IRC channel (#nag.co.za on irc.shadowfire.org) about how online isn't 'real life'. I see a raised eyebrow. Do you agree with the idea that online is somehow removed from real life, as it were? Well, let's explore that a little.

For the sake of argument, let's limit the idea of 'online' to just something such as IRC, or Internet Relay Chat in case the acronym slipped your mind. On IRC, naturally depending on the Internet data-weather and where you happen to be, people talk to each other and engage in this little thing called conversation. An intrinsic element to IRC is that people cannot see each other. Oh, they can see the nicknames of each other, and everything that may be attached to that personally (such as if you know the person or have met them online before), but overall, all you have to work with is what they are saying, have said, might say and what they decided to use for a nickname. Nicknames in themselves are complex entities; best left for another time.

It is here that people sometimes make this odd leap and assume that IRC is not 'real life'. Real life naturally has no given value, so once again, for the sake of argument, we'll assume real life means 'seeing someone face to face'. Of course, this brings up things such as telephone conversations or writing letters, but let's ignore those for now.

Okay, so somehow IRC isn't real life and that leads to several divergences. People assume that because it isn't real life, that now they can do things they usually wouldn't when talking to someone face to face. That in itself is fine. What is online but a playground where anyone and everyone can be anything or anyone? Well, yes and no. Have you ever been to a masquerade, a party where guests wear masks to hide who they are? You've probably seen one in a movie somewhere, and they are great fun.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE IDEA THAT ONLINE IS SOMEHOW REMOVED FROM REAL LIFE, AS IT WERE?

However, like any party, there are certain requirements. The most important one is that everyone has a good understanding of what is going on and that it is a party they are at. You don't wear the masks at home, to bed, to school, although the metaphorical implications are quite blatant.

People tend to treat online, and IRC, as a permanent masquerade, which in itself is not malignant, just a little selfish. The realm of online isn't a set place and time, and not everyone considers it the same thing. Back to IRC – people who pretend to be someone else on IRC, or who get enjoyment out of doing things they wouldn't usually do in real life, well... they present a problem, mostly because they don't bother first finding out if everyone else in that set location is playing at being someone else.

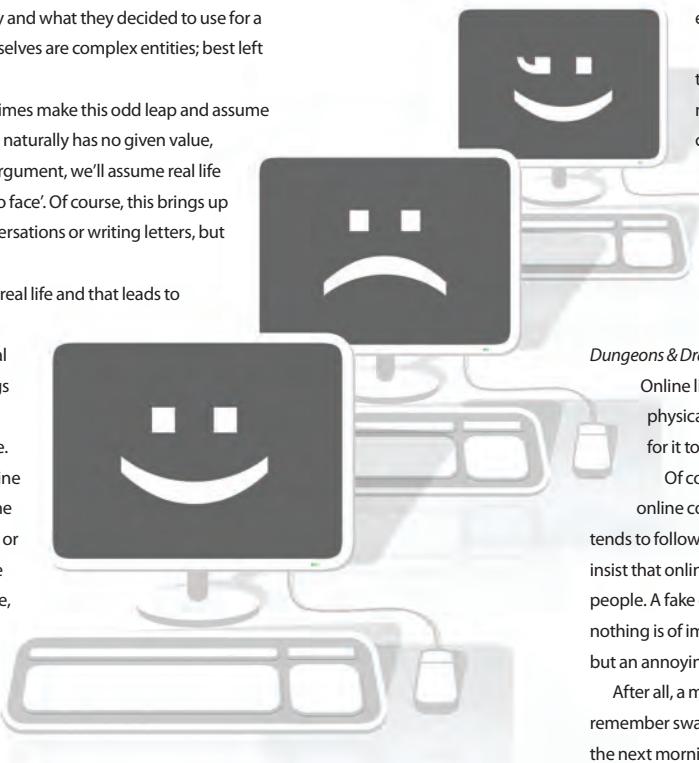
What fun is playing hide-and-seek when some players are actually playing Cops and Robbers, while others are playing Cowboys and Indians? Let's not talk about Timmy over there, who is playing with himself. Sure, you can consider the online realm 'a game', but it is certainly not removed from real life. When people talk on IRC, they aren't on some other realm of existence, nor are they engaging in some metaphysical-breaking form of communication. Sure, you may find it prudent to hide behind a nickname, cuddling a false sense of security to your chest, but you're mostly delusional if you even entertain that thought too far.

However, I'm generalising. Not everyone runs away to California to be a runaway street bum. Everyone has motives, agendas, hopes and dreams – it's how they choose to interact with others that will determine how they are remembered. Naturally, most people shirk this idea away by simply never choosing a permanent nickname, or they go so far as to have multiple 'persona' online. I guess I don't have to explain to you how ironic it is when someone does that. Didn't popular culture mock *Dungeons & Dragons* players for years, for doing exactly that?

Online life, while certainly quite different in many ways to the physical life everyone inhabits, still shares enough key points for it to be more Real than Fake.

Of course, there are people who insist that IRC, hence online communication, is fake life and not real life. Well, form tends to follow function in such instances I've found, and if people insist that online is fake life, then that's what it will be for those people. A fake existence where what they are doing amounts to nothing is of importance to nobody, and truthfully, remains nothing but an annoying footnote in the annals of online history.

After all, a mosquito sure is annoying, but you don't really remember swatting it to death during the night when you wake up the next morning. **NAG**



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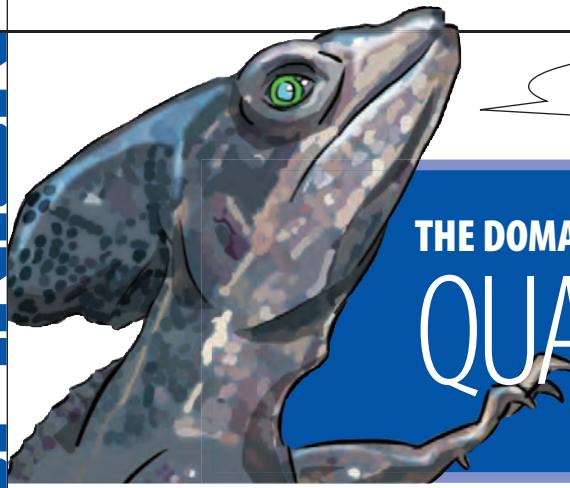
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Look & Listen
For the Fans



THE DOMAIN OF THE_BASILISK QUAKE AT STAKE

By Anton Lines

SO, THE CYBERATHLETE PROFESSIONAL League just chose *Quake III* for its 2006 World Season. Yes, the CPL is back, and no, *Quake III* is not a typo. After a poll on their forums revealed that 80% of participants wanted the 1999 classic used in tournaments again, the world's most renowned e-sports organisation gave in to community wishes and announced the change from *Quake 4* to its predecessor. Consequently, everyone is rejoicing. Everyone except me, that is.

When *Quake III* proclaimed in a sturdy Austrian accent, "I'll be back", not many believed it. After all, even the Governor himself is getting old. The CPL dropped *Quake III* from its tournaments in 2002, and after that, only the Electronic Sports World Cup persisted in using it. With the arrival of *Quake 4* last year, even they switched to the new game.

General dissatisfaction with *Quake 4*, however, has led to the CPL's decision. Why do I disagree with it? Well, *Quake III* is without a doubt the better game at the moment. It has had seven years' worth of development from id Software and mod teams; it has fundamentally better multiplayer maps; and most importantly, it has GTV functionality (allowing spectators to connect to the game without lagging the server).

Quake 4, on the other hand, has numerous sound issues, flawed maps, and no GTV. But – and this is a big but – if you compare *Quake 4* to *Quake III* as it stood a year after its release, *Quake III* had just as many problems, probably more. Competitive mods for

TO ABANDON ITS IMMENSE POTENTIAL, WHICH FAR EXCEEDS THAT OF QUAKE III

Quake 4 have already achieved all the essential features of their *Quake III* counterparts. id Software too has shown its commitment to improving *Quake 4*, by hiring a community liaison and fixing many of the initial bugs. By the time you read this, patch 1.3 will be out. The current tournament maps are infinitely better than the default selection, and new ones are being created all the time. The game looks better for spectators and sponsors, running a far more sophisticated graphics engine. In addition, it has enhanced features such as slide-movement and the ability to fire projectiles through teleporters. We still don't have GTV, but such software should be available from third-party developers before the end of the year.

My issue with the CPL's decision is simply the timing. The criticisms of *Quake 4* are all valid, but to abandon the game now is to abandon its immense potential, which far exceeds that of *Quake III*. *Quake III* is a completed game with little room for improvement, whereas *Quake 4* will continue improving for years. To make the decision a mere two weeks before the release of the 1.3 patch is premature.

By switching to *Quake III* in the middle of a *Quake 4* world series (i.e., the World Series of Video Games), the CPL has effectively split the deathmatch community in two. Contrary to the results of the poll, about half of pro-gamers have stated they will remain with *Quake 4*, as that's where the money is. Both games will now suffer from reduced communities, which is bad news for an already flagging genre. My advice (though I doubt anyone will take it) would be to continue with *Quake 4* until the end of 2006. If by then the problems haven't been ironed out, it'll be reasonable to start doubting they will. However, most importantly, delaying the decision would allow the WSVG's season to be completed, at which point the various organisations could all make the switch together, should a switch in fact turn out to be the best option. **NAG**



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DAMMIT

ESCAPAPOLOGY: THE ART OF ESCAPING

By Megan Hughes

IT ALL STARTED WITH books. Commonly known to most literate members of society, few as there may be, books were the earliest form of escapism that the human produced. Escapism, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (yet another book), is "... the tendency to seek distraction and relief from reality," which even the ancient Egyptians felt a need for. And they had a few of their own in circulation, though it seems that they preferred the walls for writing on. With the invention of the printing press in 1455, the joy of escaping reality became more accessible to the common man and encouraged writers of all variations to produce enough books of all calibres, ranging from brilliant to unmentionable, to consume, say, an Amazon full of trees. Interestingly, according to all-time bestseller lists, it seems that humans chose to escape most often into the realm of Christianity, with *The Holy Bible* being the most read book worldwide.

Books also happen to be the basis for all modern forms of

**HOW OFTEN
DO YOU HEAR
OR READ
ABOUT SOME
GRUMPY GAMER
COMPLAINING
ABOUT THE LACK
OF A 'STORYLINE'
IN THIS OR THAT
GAME?**

escapism (some of which were probably thought up just to save a few of the aforementioned trees). Live theatre productions, for example, are just stories acted out, or even sung, for those with weak imaginations or the inability to read a few well-constructed sentences, and movies are just stories, well written or not, stored on film and spewed worldwide for the couch potato's enjoyment.

How often do you hear or read about some grumpy gamer complaining about the lack of a 'storyline' in this or that game? How often has that gamer been you? It's an important issue for gamers, especially when they find that a game is lacking its most basic function: a narrative worth getting lost in. Without this, a game cannot provide any type of release from everyday life, and a game that does not let us break away from our own miserable world for a few hours has completely missed the point. Why? Because escapism is the very point of gaming, just as in books.

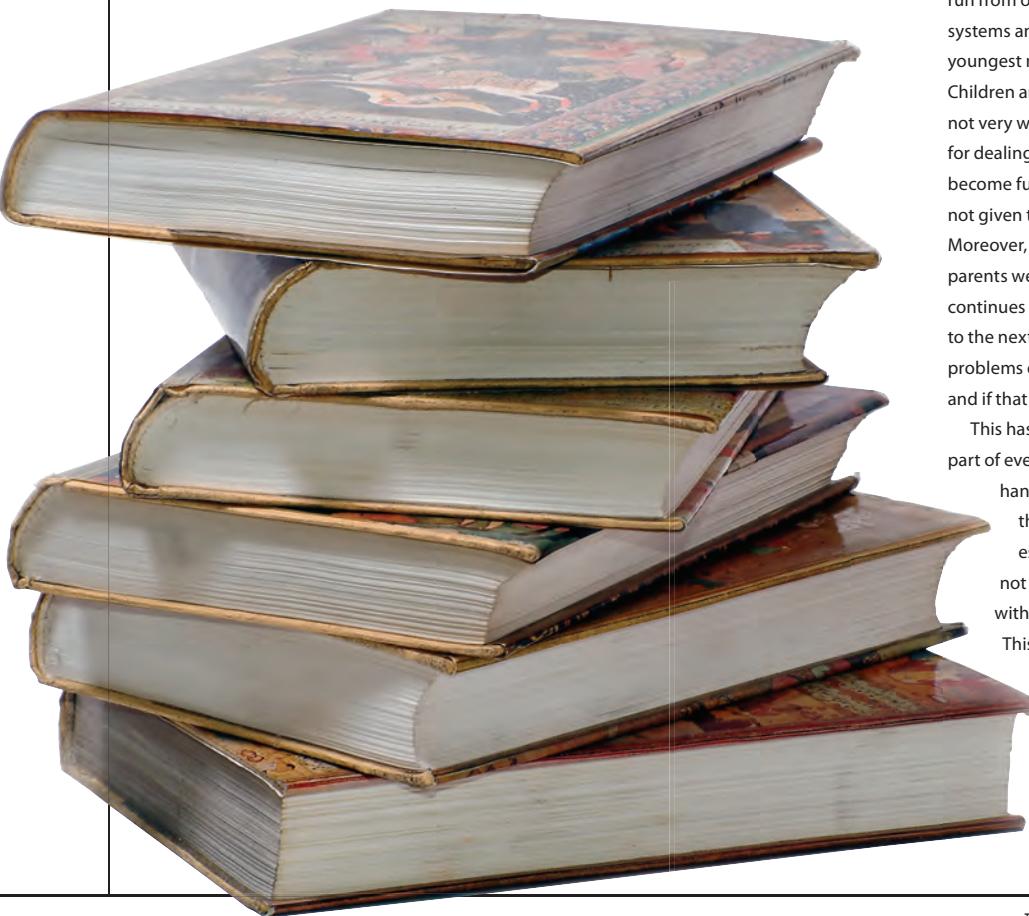
However, why do we feel such a desperate need to escape? Alternatively, more correctly, when did we forget how not to run from our worlds? There is a basic flaw in both our education systems and our family systems in that neither are teaching the youngest members of our society how to deal with problems. Children are being taught math and science, and sometimes not very well, but they are not being shown the skills necessary for dealing with day-to-day life. How can we expect adults to become fully functioning members of society when they were not given the skills to become just that when they were young? Moreover, in allowing 'socially-uneducated' adults to become parents we are allowing the problem to mushroom! This cycle continues as the parents of the previous generation demonstrate to the next the only way they know how to deal with any problems or difficulties that come their way: avoid at all costs, and if that doesn't work, try ignoring by doing something else.

This has bred the current culture of escapism that has become part of everyday life, both business and pleasure. And it comes

handy with its own set of problems. People who avoid their problems by subscribing to one or more means of escapism, which is currently seen as the acceptable, if not completely natural, thing to do, ultimately never deal with the problems that got them there in the first place.

This means many people walking around, seemingly average and normal members of society, who actually have a whole lot of issues and underlying problems that are just worsening as the years drag by. Stick them all together on the only inhabitable planet they can find, and you have yourself one messed up society.

Now who wouldn't want to escape that? **NAG**





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KINGPIN

MOVIE DOPES* AND THE FEEBLE MIND AND SOFT OF INTELLECT

By Michael James

IN MY LITTLE UNIVERSE, there are two clear reasons why cinema patrons are spending less time in the theatres and more time at home with their own personal home systems. In South Africa, the people who run the movie complexes and some of the idiots who go to movie complexes are single-handedly putting everyone else off. This is a rant because I can. This is a rant because something good might come out of it. If I reach just three people out there it's worth the tapping, ink and paper.

CINEMA COMPLEXES

As much as I love playing games, I love watching movies. In my world, the two go hand in hand. I like to think that if I go to the mighty Monte Casino in Gauteng with the best-looking and -feeling cinema in the country (wide padded seats and a little coffee table each) I'm going to get the best experience possible. I mean, they built that multimillion gold coin palace of a casino thinking people would consider it grand and enticing, and most do - except a few others and me, I'm sure. You see, the grand facade cannot hide the fact that the cinema inside is a joke. Movies start without sound. (I missed the opening dialogue for that arty space movie with George Clooney, *Solaris*). Imagine not having had sound for the opening 10 minutes of *Star Wars* when you first saw it, or even worse, *Blade Runner*. Hi, I'm the guy who didn't hear the opening monologue in *Blade Runner* – I didn't even know it was there. Equally annoying is the crackling and popping of the speakers when things explode. Do you have any idea how much money is spent on getting the sound just right in a movie? They've been known to show movie footage at the wrong aspect ratio (you know; when Clint Eastwood is ten feet tall). The list goes on, so I won't bore you, and it's almost every single time I go (no exaggeration). Yes, I know... go somewhere else idiot. I would if I didn't like those seats so much - I'm a victim of my own needs.

I like to attend the movies at 09:00 on a Friday morning, if I can, and especially if something epic like *Pirates of the Caribbean* or *Superman* is first screening, I do this because I want to avoid the general movie-going public. However, in doing this, I'm there too early in the morning to be afforded hot fresh popcorn, because most of the staff reluctantly drag their backsides to work at around 09:15 and then forget to heat up the popcorn

THE PEOPLE WHO RUN THE MOVIE COMPLEXES AND SOME OF THE IDIOTS WHO GO TO MOVIE COMPLEXES ARE SINGLE-HANDEDLY PUTTING EVERYONE ELSE OFF

machine (it takes about 20 minutes to go from cold to popped edible popcorn). So what do I get for my general public avoidance technique? Popcorn from the night before! Yum! Monte Casino cinema management is free to comment in this magazine if they like, but only after I've had my say.

MOVIEGOERS

This is about the people who go to the cinema complexes. If you're 20 minutes late for a movie, don't bother going in. You've missed the gist of it, especially if it requires a little thought, and, more importantly, you're disturbing everyone else who was there on time. Shut up, nobody else cares about how clever you are or what you know. I'm afraid you're just talking about yourself to sound clever or make an impression. Develop some confidence and you won't need to keep blabbering to be heard. Cellphones can be switched to silent and still be annoying – your SMS typing produces light which distracts me from the movie. Rather watch the movie. Unless someone is dying it can't be that important. Also, remember to shut up. In the queue outside, decide what you want before you get to the counter. The queue is usually long, so you have all the time in the world. What kind of clod arrives at the counter and then starts looking at the menu. It's only popcorn, coke and sweets, for goodness' sake. You're not buying a new cellphone, so move it along. A movie is an experience removed from reality and that's how it's supposed to be enjoyed. Talking, getting up to go a buy a chocolate or tapping on your cellular means you're not enjoying it. So do everyone a favour, especially yourself, and leave...

* **Disclaimer:** NAG Magazine, the Editors and management, and yes, even a few of the sales people do not advocate the use of drugs. Doing drugs wastes money. This is the same money that you should be spending on this magazine, games, and upgrading that pile of junk you call a computer.

Rant summary: If there's any technical problem, go to the manager and demand your money back. If enough people do this, they'll eventually wake up in that little office there. And for the patrons: sit down, shut the hell up, turn off your cellphones, shut up, open your giant box of sweets before the movie starts, get there on time and stop being stupid, and above all, if you really loved the movie, cheer and clap when the credits roll. It's what they do in America, so it must be cool, and they probably made the movie anyway. Are we clear? **NAG**

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GAMING GROWN UP

TAKING TWO STEPS FORWARD, TO FIND ITSELF A COMFORTABLE FEW STEPS BACK

PARALLELS ARE THINGS THAT can help give context to an idea, by trying to find common themes between multiple ideas, usually by drawing out and bringing attention to elements that are shared between such ideas.

Many parallels could be drawn between the idea of Episodic Content (recently brought to the mainstream attention by companies such as Valve and Telltale, not to mention Ritual Entertainment) and other forms of media that 'slice up' and divide content across multiple instances. For example, if you study Hollywood through the 1950s up to today, you'll notice several ideas: the Blockbuster, the Serial, the Brand and the Episode. Each found a place in how movies and television have been shaped for today's world, and each is as important as the next.

With that idea in mind, it is important to stress that Episodic Content is not a replacement for existing business models. Rather, it should be considered a late (and perhaps forgotten) addition to the vast 'Metaverse' of videogame creation, distribution and consumption.

There are many concerns surrounding Episodic Content, but first, let's define exactly what Episodic Content is. Looking at games such as *Bone* (Telltale), *Half-Life 2: Episode 1* (Valve) and *SiN Episodes: Emergence* (Ritual), there is an immediate pattern: such games have a much shorter release time and are segmented up into television-style episodes, each episode with its own narrative, start, conclusion and more often than not, cliff-hanger ending. After all, if everyone knew what was actually going on in popular TV drama *Lost*, why continue watching it?

Traditionally (at least in the recent era), games have followed a Blockbuster approach. After a lengthy (three to seven years) development time, not to mention a substantial chunk of financial investment, the game is completed and released to the market as a Big Thing. Once in the market, the pre- and post-advertising try to squeeze as much money out of the product, first into the pockets of the publishers who funded its development, and then into the wallets of its creators (usually only years later). This cycle repeats itself until one of two things happen, as is indicated by history: either the developer doesn't get enough money back and folds; or the publisher notices it has a developer capable of making it money, and thus will fund future projects of such developers more easily. However, publishers don't have infinite money, and often there are causalities, the most famous of which being the sorely missed Looking Glass Studios, who created masterpieces such as the *Thief* series and *System Shock*. Before 2000, publisher Eidos had to make a choice about money. It could either continue funding Looking Glass, or push money into a new start-up company called Ion Storm, headed by the insufferable John Romero. The choice it made is obvious. The game *Daikatana* by Ion Storm can be found almost anywhere, since



it barely sold while Looking Glass closed its doors forever.

The traditional Developer/Publisher model did, once upon a time, work and work very well. A large publisher can act as an incubator for smaller developers, nurturing them and creating an environment of shared ideas, technology and, more importantly, funding. However, this model isn't a cure-all and the disappearance of companies such as Acclaim, Interplay, Muckyfoot, Indie-Built, Rockstar Vienna and others are a clear indication of this.

What is needed are more publishing and distribution models, so in steps Episodic Content.

Often, people confuse Episodic Content with Brand, such as the Vice President of Epic, Mark Rein. He notes that *Mario Bros* is Episodic, but the truth is that *Mario Bros* is a Brand, one that has served Nintendo well for the better part of the last century. Calling *Mario Bros* Episodic would be akin to calling Chuck Norris episodic, and he probably wouldn't like that.

The best parallel to draw, would be to television, one that much of the Publisher-centric industry seems unwilling to make. Episodic Content are Episodes, with an overarching plot spanning several smaller stories, much how each episode of *Battlestar Galactica* has its own story, but remains mindful of the main plot of trying to reach Earth. Naturally, this model has several advantages, but the negative concerns around Episodic Content should be addressed first.

The general feeling towards Episodic Content is that the consumers will be ripped off. People are afraid of paying more for a game that has been subdivided into episodes, and also worry about what happens if the developers go under right in the middle of their game.

Well, once again television offers up prime examples of how these concerns are both valid and moot at the same time.

The Blockbuster model is sure to produce at least one game before a developer finds itself in financial crisis, and that bodes well for the consumer in the short-term, but it limits the games to being single-shot consumables with, if lucky, a sequel five or so years later. After all, there was a seven-year gap between *Half-Life 1* and *Half-Life 2*. How many *Half-Life* fans can honestly say they'd be willing to wait another seven years for *Half-Life 3*? Even Valve doesn't think they could wait that long, with Gabe Newell being one of the most outspoken advocates of Episodic Content. As for consumers possibly being short-changed, well, that's been happening since the dawn of time, hasn't it? Often a game simply isn't worth the R399 paid for it, despite the Blockbuster model applied to its production. That leaves the gamer R399 short, with a game they don't like.



However, what if you could split that game up into three R120 components? If the player finds they don't enjoy the game after the first episode, they then don't have to purchase the rest.

As mentioned before, Episodic Content is not a replacement, just an additional model. As such, it won't work for every developer and it requires a certain type of team and technology to make it work. Valve, from the start, intended Steam to be a content delivery system that facilitates Episodic, though Steam on its own has its various pros and cons in relation to bandwidth, local download cost, as well as the issue with not everyone having a credit card. That aside, the benefits to Episodic, when laid bare, are appealing. The benefits to developers include having a much shorter turnaround time for their Episodes, letting developers focus more intently on smaller, compartmentalised projects, instead of one massive multi-billion dollar monolith. Naturally, the tinfoil hat wearing gamers are concerned about 'asset reuse', such as seeing the same piece of level or perhaps the same enemy or chair, repeatedly. That is not a failing of Episodic, but rather lazy or shortsighted developers, and is easily cured - just don't buy another Episode from that developer. Other benefits also include a much quicker uptake of technology into each Episode, as long as the developers are capable. The Blockbuster model facilitates upgrading every few years, since such a long span between games means graphics cards and other PC components have already gone through several revisions. Look at *Doom 3* for example, which was slated to take advantage of the "Advanced Power of the GeForce 3." The game was finally released many years later, and barely ran on a GeForce 3. With Episodic, developers can more quickly incorporate hardware advances as well as pushing a few more pixels out of your current hardware, though, once again, that is dependent on the developer.

More immediate, working on smaller projects allows developers more interaction with their customers and communities, which in turn influences future episodes. Already, the next episodes of both *Half-Life 2* and *SiN Episodes* have been changed, adjusted and tailored-based on the community feedback Valve and Ritual received. Coupled with that, both developers are taking advantage of the complex feedback system Steam allows, telling the developers which levels the players played more, or less, where players died the most and the least, and which guns players preferred on the whole. Such statics are naturally just statistics. It is up to the developers what to make of them and what choices are made based on the feedback. It is still too early to see if Valve or Ritual is gleaned anything useful from the complex series of numbers, though both developers have been very clear to express how useful the statistics have been to them personally.

Quite surprisingly, there is another company that has also adopted an Episodic model right off the bat, namely Arena.Net with its *Guild Wars* series. Each *Guild Wars* 'Chapter' is, in truth, an Episode. Each can be played separately and independently of each other, or together with the rest to create a cohesive whole - the core idea behind Episodic. The same can be said for *Half-Life 2 Episodes*, where each episode can be played on its own, though naturally one would prefer to start at the beginning and not just start buying midway.

The obvious benefits to being able to drop a game midway, and not having to



pay for the rest if you don't like it, is clear, though this comes at the 'high cost' of most such delivery systems requiring the use of a credit card. Certain developers still allow their episodes to be published in the more traditional means (which is useful for South Africa), though this can lead to confusion if not everyone is on the same wave-length. A prime example of this is the (at the time of writing) retail price of R299 for a box copy of *SiN Episodes: Emergence*, when the price should be more in line with the \$20 per episode most developers are aiming for, and which would translate to R120 for a box copy. The R299 tag for a R120 game is an honest mistake, but one that could be repeated if distributors or publishers don't pay attention to what they are selling.

The credit card problem isn't truly a problem, since Episodic is naturally fitting itself into a more 'mature' market of gamers. The entire premise of Episodic lends itself to a more comfortable consumption of games, spurred on by the fact that not everyone has the time to spend 10 hours or upwards playing a game. Naturally, the younger gamers who have the time and dedication to actually take up boasts from games on '200 hours of gameplay' will do so, and already scoff at the notion of a 'paltry four to six hours of gameplay'. Meanwhile, those who have jobs, families and such are looking at that four to six hours and are thinking, "I can manage that after I put the kids to bed." After all, gaming has been around long enough for even the casual gamers to now have offspring, despite what the media tells you about what geeks do (or don't do) in the bedroom.

Therefore, such gamers who are enticed by the shorter, more easily consumed playtime will most of the time have either a credit card, or means/access to one. As for the costs/time involved in downloading an Episode from something such as Steam, that is only a problem if you labour under the delusion that somehow South Africa is owed anything by anyone in terms of the Internet. Sad to say, but South Africa will simply have to pick up its proverbial skirt and start running, if it doesn't wish to get left behind. Steam on its own, thankfully, has a clever mechanism for only sending you content that you need, instead of what you already have, thus the shared asset idea between Episodes can actually work for South Africa, as long as the idea is not abused to create copy/paste levels or monsters.

Gaming has come such a long, lopsided circle since the late 1980s. Originally, the idea behind shareware was to hand out the first episode of the game for free, a demo of sorts, which would lure people into buying the rest – the full game. Some of the more ambitious developers of that era actually sold each episode separately, but history remembers the *Commander Keen* series as a set of 'sequels', instead of what they really were – episodes that continued the tale of one interesting babysitter and his yellow helmet.

In future, Episodic may even see the return of this model, where the first episode is free to get people interested in the rest – a Pilot Episode if you will. This, unfortunately, relies on a much more positive uptake of the idea behind Episodic Content, instead of getting stuck in the 'what-ifs' of misleading or misappropriating developers. Thankfully, with industry visionaries and leaders such as Valve behind the concept, we can be sure to see many more Episodic offerings in the future under a wonderful 'Coming Soon to a Game Near You' banner, alongside the traditional Blockbuster games that explode onto the market every few years.



TELLTALE GAMES, WITH ITS NEWLY RELEASED *BONE* EPISODIC AND UPCOMING *SAM & MAX* EPISODIC, IS A FIRM ADVOCATE OF EPISODIC CONTENT ALONGSIDE VALVE AND RITUAL. NAG CAUGHT UP WITH DAN CONNORS (CEO) AND KEVIN BRUNER (CHIEF TECHNICAL OFFICER) FROM TELLTALE AND ASKED THEM A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT EPISODIC CONTENT.

When did Telltale first consider going Episodic for *Bone*, and what was the reasoning behind it?

Dan Connors: We always intended for *Bone* to be Episodic. We formed Telltale to be an Episodic gaming company. For *Bone*, it's completely consistent with the way *Bone* and other comic books are generally delivered. As a company, we see the emergence of broadband leading to a broadcast model of on-demand content. As this model develops, Episodic delivery of content will be in great demand.

***Sam & Max - Season 1* is also set to be Episodic, albeit in a more television-inspired fashion. Was the decision to make *Sam & Max* episodic-based on the success of *Bone*, or is it just such a viable business model for smaller developers?**

Dan Connors: We formed Telltale to define what an Episodic game is and help shape the future. *Sam & Max* is a great license for doing that, because the characters can go anywhere and do anything.

How often does technology improve between the episodes? The two *Bone* episodes currently out are very close on the surface, but was there improvement under the hood?

Kevin Bruner: We use the same game engine for all our games, and we're constantly improving it. Most of the improvements that happened after *Out from Boneville* came out, made *The Great Cow Race* easier to make. One big





improvement between *Out from Boneville* and *The Great Cow Race* is in the animation compression. In *Out from Boneville*, the characters look a little twitchy, but they move nice and smoothly in *The Great Cow Race*.

How much of *Sam & Max* is created on the same technology that gave *Bone* his gaming debut?

Kevin Bruner: *Sam & Max* is using the same technology that brought *Bone* and *CSI* to life, though we are making some improvements for *Sam & Max*. Most of the progress is being made in graphics and 'gameplay' systems, like the driving sections of the game. *Bone* didn't use all of the graphics features that the technology can do. *Sam & Max* will have all the bells and whistles turned on (as *CSI* did!).

How does Telltale feel about Episodic gaming? Both *SiN Emergence* and *Half-Life 2 Episodes* are following the model, with more on the way. Does Telltale feel it is a viable model for future game creation sectors (though naturally, not suited to everyone)?

Dan Connors: I consider Episodic games to be a type of game of the future. How the Episodic model works will be shaped by what current and future game audiences want. The Internet has already been a major driver in the success of MMORPGs because it's so effective in supporting a community, and as digital delivery becomes a bigger part of entertainment, we'll see gaming content delivered in all kinds of ways.

How has *Bone*, being Episodic, benefited Telltale, in hindsight? Were there any hurdles/surprises that were very unexpected?

Dan Connors: It has allowed us to refine the game experience and better tailor the product for the audience. The hurdle has been in dealing with the amount of responsibility Telltale has had in defining and explaining what Episodic games are. There has been a ton of judgment about what Episodic games are, based on the first, and in some cases, the second episode of a series. We won't know the whole story about Episodic games until franchises are on their twenty-first episode, until the price point, length of play, and other logistics have been refined, and until users are getting new innovative content monthly.

Is Telltale looking at any other licenses to create Episodic games for?

Dan Connors: Always.. [NAG](#)

COVER STORY: HELLGATE: LONDON

HELLGATE

LONDON



Developer: Flagship Studios **Publisher:** Namco **Distributor:** TBA **Genre:** Action RPG **Platform:** PC **Release:** TBA

AS HUMANS GOT MORE COMFORTABLE WITH SCIENCE, THEY LEFT BEHIND SUPERSTITION AND BELIEF IN THE DANGERS OF THE DARKER POWERS. THEN, DIMENSIONAL GATES OPENED AND SOON THE WORLD WAS OVERRUN WITH DEMONIC HORDES. THAT IS BAD NEWS FOR HUMANITY, BUT PERFECT FOR ANYONE EAGER TO CUT A PATH THROUGH THE MONSTERS AND SEE WHAT THEY DROP. NAG WENT TO SAN FRANCISCO AND SAT DOWN WITH FLAGSHIP STUDIOS TO LOOK AT ITS NEW HACK AND SLASH TITLE, *HELLGATE: LONDON*.

“WE PLAN TO PUT ‘From the Makers of *Diablo II*’ on the box.” Bill Roper sat across the table from us and if you consider his grin and relaxed attitude, you might think he is kidding. However, despite the warm atmosphere of Flagship Studio’s San Francisco office, the team is deadly serious about its first game, *Hellgate: London*, and makes no excuses about its origins. Flagship is best known for its high ratio of prominent Blizzard employees who left the company, apparently due to strained relations with Blizzard’s publisher, Vivendi. Roper, along with Kenneth Williams, Erich Schaefer, as well as former Blizzard president David Bevik form part of a former-Blizzard group that boasts, amongst other things, the *Diablo* games to their credit.

However, Flagship’s reputation is set to change. After creating the company, the team set about researching ideas for their first game. According to Roper, leaving Blizzard was a matter of exploring new avenues. The two studios are still on very good terms, which is why Flagship can get away with mentioning ‘*Diablo*’ when talking about *Hellgate*. But the pedigree is obvious.

“Someone came up with the idea of *Diablo* meets *Half-Life 2*,” Roper explained. The idea took root and making use of an organic development process, a game idea was slowly built into what might be the next big revolution in the hack and slash world. At Flagship, ideas are applied in context to the game. Instead of pages upon pages of design documents drawn up ahead of time, *Hellgate* started with a structure and evolved as test players uncovered problems and the team discovered improvements. Roper partly credits this fluid approach to game design to the Blizzard days. “The

skill tree in *Diablo II*, the concept to layout skills that way was based out of guys at Blizzard North who were playing *Starcraft* while it was in development. They thought the tech trees were really cool, so you start thinking where you want to build. So they figured they should arrange the skills that way.” Ideas are often introduced to *Hellgate* through white papers. When someone has an idea, they would type a one to two-page document making the argument for the changes. Once debated and mulled over, the new feature might be added. But there’s care not to attach something because it’s ‘cool’. Features and ideas aren’t applied with disregard for what *Hellgate* is.

THE DEVIL PLAYS DICE

But what is *Hellgate*? The game is based in the near future. Demons have come through dimensional rifts and overrun the world. Fortunately, one group of ancient warriors, the Templar, has known about the imminent arrivals of the demons and made preparations. Unfortunately, one secret society isn’t enough and humankind is soon chased underground, to the safety of the London Underground stations. The Templar was smart enough to influence the construction of these stations, adding materials to them that keep the demons at bay – so-called demonic fallout shelters. These stations serve as the traditional hub town where players can buy (and sell) equipment, find more missions and patch themselves up. Then it is back out to the big, bad world overrun with the spawn of Hell.

Hell on Earth and tearing the resulting monsters to pieces is not a new concept, though. But Flagship, despite being a new



studio, has serious veteran status behind it. One aspect from action RPGs that the developer wanted to exploit was that things could be random. This feature was one of the reasons behind the *Diablo* phenomenon, and has since become a staple of the genre. But as the saying goes, don't accept what you can't change. Flagship saw a lot of room for expansion in the concept. In *Diablo*, you could expect shuffled level layouts and repopulated worlds. In *Hellgate*, you might want to nail something down before it changes. So-called instancing is so prevalent in the game that it affects everything and ups the amount of rare things players can find.

Roper eagerly elaborates on this feature in the game. "We added this concept of rarity across everything, not just items and monsters. Even backgrounds – so you might find that when I come into this area, there would be a 1 in 10,000 chance that it's just a red fiery version, where the sky is red and flames are everywhere. So you found this cool fire version of this level, which we can do because it's all instanced."

The first major change is how levels appear. Landmark areas, such as one featuring Big Ben, have a certain stability to them. The level might be random, but players will experience some familiarity. The underground stations are set in their look and design, the stable hubs of the world. However, between these hubs and landmarks are routes that apply a much wider range of options. For instance, when a player enters a level, it's not certain whether it will be on the streets, in the sewers, in the subways, between tight alleys or tombs, to name a few options. If a certain geographic landmark is close to the level in question, players might find themselves close to it, such as running alongside the river Thames. A player will travel through two or more of these as they make their way to a different part of the world, and every time they go into one, not only will the layout and monsters be different, but the very environment and setting change. As Roper explained, this even affects the sky and lighting design. Instancing is the key word here.

"If I go to Garden district, I might be in the streets above town or I might be in the sewers or the underground. So we have all these different sets that we can draw from. The thing that's really nice about that is its self-balancing."





CLASSES

Likewise, classes are taken a step further. Traditionally, a class would select attributes for you. The classes in action RPGs are pretty standard by now – a strongman, a magic user, a ranged fighter and a few variations on these themes, such as dark magic or specialisation in certain weapons. There have been moves and variations away from these themes, such as the monk in the third-party *Diablo* expansion, but in the end, classes are staples because they are practical. Instead of upsetting this balance, Flagship sought to expand on it.

There have been games that also approached classes differently. *Dungeon Siege*, with its player-controlled character evolution, was definitely one. But just as there was more opportunity with instancing, traditional classes are not at the end of their tether. In *Hellgate*, classes are treated more as factions. There are two known of so far: the melee-orientated Templar and the magical Cabalist. Factions' relationships vary depending on their history and the philosophy behind their cause.

Everyone wants to fight Hell, but not surprisingly, there are differences on how this should be done. As such, initially *Hellgate* embraces the usual separation seen between character classes. But this changes as a player does tasks and quests for other factions, gaining respect from them. This is beneficial not only to find new missions, but can also unlock some of that faction's skills, weapons and equipment.

According to Roper, this interaction gives a new level of personal development to a character. "You could be a Cabalist who wields a sword, traditionally a Templar weapon, and you might just be one of ten guys on the server who can do it. So when people see you they might wonder, 'Why do you have that weapon?' And then it becomes your character and it becomes your story." But it's not merely a case of sweet-talking someone to get to their stuff. Within a class, a character will have a wide selection of skills to invest in. These skills adapt a character to do specific things, which eventually creates a specific



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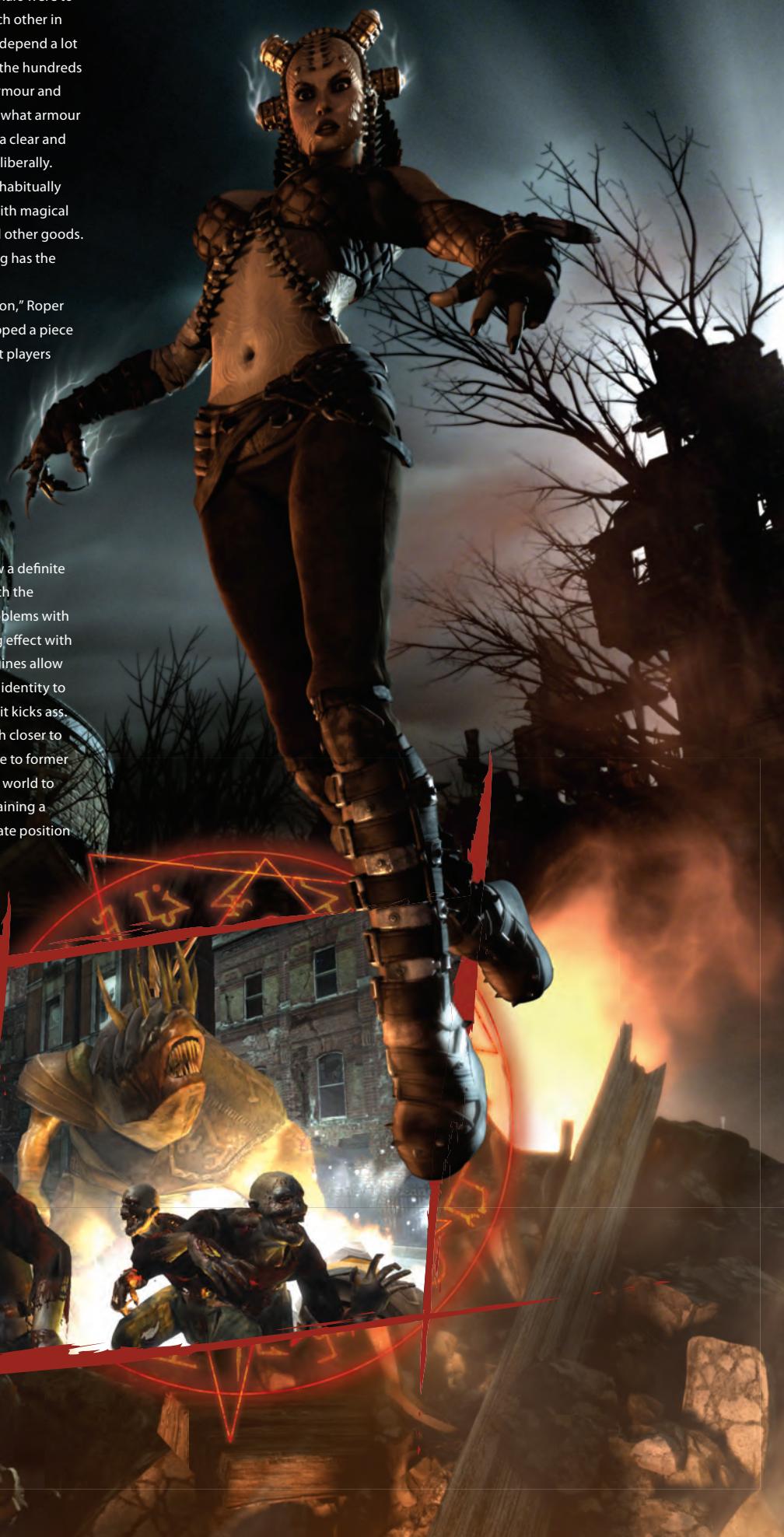


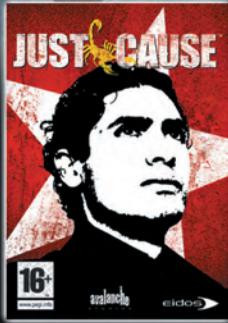
discipline. Flagship doesn't want players to feel as if their hand is being forced. Choosing a faction gives a character a basic structure and approach, but the idea is that if three Level 60 Templars were to meet up on a server, they should be very different to each other in terms of their skills. Likewise, character appearance will depend a lot on what a player wants and finds. Thanks to instancing, the hundreds of items and weapons can be modified in many ways. Armour and armour decoration and combo schemes are affected by what armour is being used and which class uses it. Looking for loot is a clear and obvious feature in *Hellgate*, since the game embraces it liberally. While running around, demonstrating the game, Roper habitually bashed at crates, inspected chests and cleared rubble with magical blasts. The scavenger hunt yielded health, weapons and other goods. So did slain monsters. In the genre's tradition, everything has the opportunity to drop something useful.

"The stuff monsters drop has been a point of discussion," Roper says when queried about a small monster than just dropped a piece of armour bigger than itself. But the concession was that players don't care so much about the paradox of flying bugs carrying metal weapons as they do about finding those weapons. "It would put players off," Roper explains. "If only bi-peds dropped armour, it wouldn't leave much reason to be excited with other kinds of monsters."

LOCK AND LOAD

Players can collect armour and skills while going up the levels of their characters. But hack and slash games draw a definite line between them and more traditional RPG games, with the zealous approach to action and violence. One of the problems with otherwise excellent games in the genre is the distancing effect with the traditional isometric view. Even though modern engines allow for more closer cameras, few games give a true sense of identity to a character, other than that you should see how he/she/it kicks ass. One game in recent years has brought the concept much closer to a personal experience. *Guild Wars* also owes its existence to former Blizzard staffers. The game makes use of the open MMO world to create a more personal touch, while essentially still remaining a hack and slash. *Hellgate* puts players in a similarly intimate position





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by paying a lot of attention to the view modes. Players can switch between third- and first-person views whenever they wish, except in the case of melee combat. Roper insists that there are too many cool fighting ideas, such as special moves and combos, which would not work in first-person.

But a gun means that it can point out from the bottom of the screen. Unlike many games that tried a similar marriage, *Hellgate* doesn't simply shift the camera to right in front of the character's face. Flagship placed a lot of effort into making sure that the FPS component is solid. The game isn't a traditional FPS title in that sense, though players can go into certain skills that will put a more accuracy-demanding FPS approach on the game. The stats are the dominant factors in the game dynamic. This is an RPG system, after all. The weapons are varied and interesting enough, though, that players will soon be dumping what was once their most beloved means of killing for something just that much better.

A weapon's ability, uniqueness and capacity for carnage can be changed with mod slots. These are similar to gems, jewels and runes. A mod can be inserted into a slot, altering what the weapon is capable of. A weapon can have several mod slots and the augmentations show in real-time on the weapon model. But one problem with these kinds of systems is that players become hesitant to use them. Roper explains that in *Diablo II*, players only started using gems halfway into the game, hoarding good gems instead of wasting them on a weapon. The solution was simple: mods can be removed from a weapon. Some rare or extremely powerful mods might not have this ability, but *Hellgate* lets players experiment with mod combinations in weapons. This goes hand in hand with a nifty feature for choosing your weapons. Characters have three combat sets that can be switched easily. For example, a combat set can involve two weapons, but with the right mouse button set to shoot both weapons and the left only a specific one of them. Meanwhile, the second set can involve one two-handed weapon, while the third involves a weapon and magic combo. Mods are especially useful here. Mods assigned to weapons in one set can also be attached to weapons in another. It is a simple but efficient step beyond focusing just on one weapon at a time, with perhaps a bow as backup.



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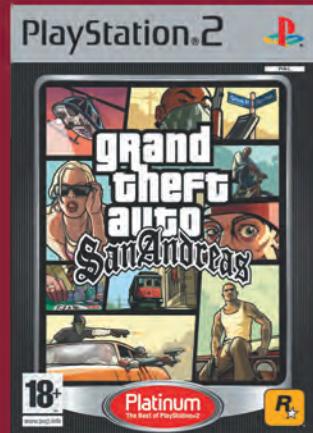
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HIGHWAY TO HELL

The idea is to encourage players, for a start, to experiment and find their own way through the game. The various factions all have their respective stories to tell through the main story quests. *Hellgate* will also create random tasks, essentially side-quests. These are designed to be played in twenty to thirty minutes, giving players the chance for quick bursts of action – ideal for levelling opportunities. These can net a player experience, gold, equipment and other surprises. Likewise, while on the battlefield, a player could run into random events. In the case of our demonstration, the character arrives at a group of Templar standing around. They explain that they are about to slay a demon and require your help. Roper agrees, demons spawn, fight ensues, and experience is gained. These events appear in areas – some are intended to be quite sought after.

All this effort – instancing, variable character development and random world events – gives the impression that *Hellgate* is emulating an online game. The reality is that Flagship wants to try and make the single-player and multiplayer games to be a nearly transparent experience. But *Hellgate* will truly live online. The team plans a lot in terms of creating online clans, easy communication between players in a level, and seamless missions with other players. The team is keeping its multiplayer features and plans close to its chest, but it will be more involved than a simple LAN session through a multiplayer map.

The team sees it as crucial that its first game makes a big impression, and the same bunch of people is very familiar with the action RPG genre. It's a case of a studio that has its heart in the right place, but also its head with plenty of experience to back a project that is ambitious – ambitious enough to be disastrous. But after taking a look at *Hellgate: London*, the distinction is clear enough to have faith that it will create a new branch in the genre and make gun-toting demon hunters out of all of us. **NAG**





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NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON

Developer: Black Box

Publisher: EA

Distributor: EA South Africa

Genre: Racing

Platform: Multi

Release: Q4 2006

THE NEED FOR SPEED series has been around for a while now and is going from strength to strength. Building on the success of *Most Wanted* and the *Underground* games, Black Box wants to take things a step further by combining these two elements, and then unleashing *Carbon* on next-generation platforms. The team spoke to NAG about what fans can expect in *Need for Speed: Carbon*.

The game is reportedly based around the Carbon Canyon in California. Why did you choose this location, and how much game area can players expect?
In *Need for Speed: Carbon*, the canyon represents the most dangerous and illicit form of racing that we have ever had in the *Need for Speed* franchise. Players will be racing on the edge and really pushing themselves on these courses. Not only do you have to defeat your opponent out there, you also have to survive the course.

When it came to moving to a new generation, what were the main steps forward for the series?

There are probably three new key areas that we think fans of the franchise will find very exciting. The first is our new mode, Canyon Duel, where you and an opponent are going head-to-head in the ultimate game of cat and mouse. The first run has you following the opponent's car trying to stay as close as you can, without going over the edge or slamming into the cliff face. The closer you are, the more points you accumulate. On the second run, the roles are reversed and he is chasing you, eating away at your score. Make it down to the bottom in one piece with points left and you have proved your mettle. Second, our physics have been a big focus this time around. Last year, we had feedback from fans of the franchise that they were looking for more differentiation between the car classes and we have taken it to heart this year. Fans will immediately feel a difference in the handling, acceleration and driving techniques the moment they try out a car from each of the different car classes – Tuner, Exotic and Muscle. Finally, the territory acquisition meta-game experience will offer fans a completely new way to play through the game. Tied in closely to the story and building your crew, dominating the city will engage you for hours at a time.



Will the next-generation versions of the games share assets with the current-generation platforms?

We've really been focusing our attention this year on designing for the next-generation systems, rather than just trying to 'up res' from the current-gen systems. This has allowed us to really evaluate things like the control system and the inherent differences in the architecture of the systems. We hope that our fans will be happy with the decisions that we've made, and will enjoy the experience that we've created in *Need for Speed: Carbon*.

When designing *Carbon*, what were the strengths and weaknesses of previous *Need for Speed* games, according to the team?

Each year we spend a lot of time working with our fans, the media, and subject-matter experts and researching the forums to get as much feedback as possible on previous versions of *Need for Speed*, to see where we can improve and innovate. We're constantly trying to take feedback and incorporate that into the design of the next game.

How will players navigate the game world?

Like *Most Wanted* and *Underground 2*, *Need for Speed: Carbon* will feature a combination of open world and closed-circuit racing. You can expect most of your interactions with the police as well as random encounters with rival crews to happen while cruising in the open world. Many of our classic game modes like Circuit, Sprint, Time Trial, etc. will take place on the closed courses, in addition to a number of thrilling new game modes that will make their debut in *Carbon*.

Destructible cars still appear not to be on the cards. Are there plans for this?

Unfortunately, not in *Need for Speed: Carbon*.

How many cars and car types can players expect in *Carbon*?

You can expect to see over 50 cars in the game this year and a car list that has expanded on where *Most Wanted* left off. There is a good distribution of tuner, exotic and muscle cars as well as a few surprises that should get people excited when the car list is officially announced later this summer!

Rumour has it that unreleased car models will also appear. Can you elaborate?

Not at this time. We'll be revealing more detail about our car list later this summer.



This game combines the familiar theme of being chased by the law with building a racing crew – a new feature to the NFS series. What prompted you into this direction?

We're always looking to be on the cutting-edge of street racing culture, and put a lot of time and effort into our research to try and identify new and compelling game modes that take their inspiration from what is happening in the real world. Fairly early on in our research it became obvious to us that there were two big things currently happening in the street racing scene that *Need for Speed* hadn't yet tapped into, and, if done correctly, would translate into a phenomenal game experience. Those two things are Canyon Racing and Crews.

Can you give more details on the team racing? Will you be able to build your own crew, how many team members are there, how do you recruit team members, and can they do the racing for you?

The crew-members that you bring into your crew will benefit the player both in and, more importantly, out of the race. You will have a limited number of spots available in your crew and many people to choose from. Each crew-member is

unique and will offer different advantages to the player if they choose to bring that person into their crew. They can help you in a race if you choose to bring them in and activate them, and they will also play a major role outside of a race with regards to visual and performance customisation, as well as having influence over the way that you interact with the cops. The meta-game revolves around you and your crew going out and challenging rival crews for control over territory that they currently own, both in the city and out on these crazy canyon courses. The best players will be able to actually dominate all of their rivals and control the entire world map!

How far can players go to modify their car setups and performance?

Visual and performance customisation has always been a foundation of the franchise. Without a doubt, players will be able to customise their rides in *Carbon*. We can't go into too much detail about it right now, but fans can look forward to experiencing the ultimate revolution in visual customisation in racing games. We think the *Need for Speed* franchise has once again raised the bar higher than any other game to date!



What kind of options are available for modifying team looks and designs?
We'll be releasing more information about the crew customisation options in the next few weeks.

Most Wanted set the bar for police chases in games. How do you plan to improve on this?

We've really tried to build on the cop experience from *Most Wanted*. We've tried to provide more context as to why the cops would be present in one area of town instead of another. Geography heat is the big new feature with the cops in *Carbon*. The more you race in one area of the city, the higher the heat level becomes, increasing the likelihood of a cop pursuit after you complete your race.

What kind of support and game modes are being considered for online racing?

Unfortunately, we cannot comment in detail about our online plans right now.

Can you comment on *Carbon*'s rumoured support for the PS3 controller's motion sensor?

Unfortunately, not at this time.

What can players expect to hear while they drive?

Like in previous versions of *Need for Speed*, fans can expect to see a very compelling music design in the game.

Will *Carbon* be a PS3 launch title?

Yes, it will.

Apart from being on the next-generation, why would you say *Carbon* would stand above what the *Need for Speed* series has delivered before?

Without a doubt, it is the Canyon Racing! This is by far one of the most intense, adrenaline rushes that a person can have in a car. Not only are you trying to defeat your opponent in these races, but you're actually just trying to survive. This mode is all about racing on the edge, danger and consequences. Combine the outstanding course designs with the innovative new scoring system and we believe we have created one of the most innovative new racing game modes since Drift and Drag were introduced to *Need for Speed* fans back in the original *Underground* series. In addition to the Canyon racing, there are some amazing new game modes and new customisation features that will blow people away! **NAG**

PREVIEWS

RED STORM RISING

AND SO THE INDUSTRY sits perched, awaiting the next big thing. Always after E3, there is a kind of calm before the storm as publishers test the waters with sporadic little releases before letting the Big Boys out to play for the last quarter of the year, the Christmas season. Now is the time to look to the East for some interesting things, and keep an eye on Russia – they're growing exponentially and will eventually rival the Western development market. The great Firewall of China is keeping that beast contained, and one can only imagine what the face of the gaming market would look like if China decided to hit game development with the same fervour that Russia and Germany have. But for now, while the West chugs along away with their release schedules, the anticipation builds.



CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

DEVELOPER: Codemasters PUBLISHER: Codemasters PLATFORM: PS3, 360, PC GENRE: Horror RELEASE DATE: 2007

IT STILL MAKES US sad that Clive Barker's *Undying* never set the gaming world alight. It was a good script-driven action title with plenty of dark horror elements and a very good plot. Still, you can't keep a good man down, especially when his body of work includes over 20 novels containing some of the most macabre, weird and just plain disturbing concepts in modern horror. Barker has another game concept, and this time veteran studio Codemasters teamed up with him to bring us *Clive Barker's Jericho*. An ancient city reappears in the middle of a desert and in it is evil that has been around since the dawn of time. In order to get to the bottom of things (and save humanity), a trained military team with arcane abilities head in to stop bad things from happening to the rest of us. It might sound a bit like a cliché, but you can expect the plot to make a few big twists and a horror-driven world far worse than the quaint imagery we saw in *F.E.A.R.* It's gearing for the next-generation, so expect *Jericho* to be a looker.

GLORY OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

DEVELOPER: Handy Games

PUBLISHER: Handy Games

PLATFORM: Mobile

GENRE: Management

RELEASE DATE: 2006

YOU ARE THE CURATOR *Varium*, which is Latin for City Planner, and it's your job to create the greatest Roman city that ever existed. Suck up to the Senate to make sure you get the resources you need by expanding on specific buildings and tasks. This will help as you juggle creating the city and managing its trade and politics, as well as keep those pesky citizens happy. Based on the PC game of the same name from CDV, this is the first appearance of a city building title on mobile platforms. Twenty-two buildings and 14 different types of supply chains will keep the gears oiled, while randomly generated levels will create a lot of strategic replay value. Obviously, this version will be scaled down from its bigger peer, but Handy Games hopes to create a management title that is fun, easy and addictive to play in your palm. The game has ten ranks players can ascend through, and tutorial levels will quickly bring you up to speed on how all roads do lead to Rome.

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WHAT WE WANT...



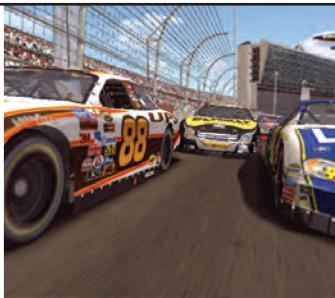
ASSASSIN'S CREED (MULTI)

From the team that brought us *Prince of Persia* we get another era piece - though this time no baggy pants. Little is known about *Assassin's Creed*, other than it should be great, if the new *Prince of Persia* series is anything to go by. So far, screenshots and artwork are pointing towards a quality game. Now if only they could tell a bit more about how it will play and if the Persian Prince will be making a cameo appearance.



METROID PRIME: CORRUPTION (WII/GC)

The *Metroid* series is looking good to go for another, with *Corruption* set for release on both the Wii and the prematurely antiquated GameCube. This time, instead of a light/dark duality, *Corruption* looks to expand on an idea that was briefly covered in the first *Metroid Prime*, that of levels changing gradually due to corruption. What's the bet that at the start you lose all your weapons and then have to fight to get them back? Classic stuff.



NASCAR 07

DEVELOPER: EA
PUBLISHER: EA Sports
PLATFORM: PS2, Xbox, PSP
GENRE: Racing
RELEASE DATE: October 2006

THE NASCAR SERIES GETS another iteration, once again with a bevy of improvements over its predecessor. Carrying the official endorsement of the NASCAR sporting authority, *NASCAR 07* will feature the latest roster of cars, teams and tracks, as well as an upgraded visual engine. It also marks the series' debut on the PSP, which will add four-player races to the mix via wireless. Since a race can be a demanding exercise, especially one you don't want to be interrupted and be forced to start over, the PSP version also has a Red Flag, which saves your game mid-race and allows you to pick things up later. Meanwhile, the series at large has a few new additions. The Lightning Challenge mode has 31 different driving-orientated challenges to complete for new cars, teams and tracks. *Full Auto's* rewind feature is also appearing, as you can rewind a few seconds if you make a mistake such as taking a corner too fast (provided you have the required skill points).



WORLD SNOOKER CHAMPIONSHIP 2007

DEVELOPER: Blade Interactive
PUBLISHER: Sega
PLATFORM: PS2, PS3, 360
GENRE: Sport
RELEASE DATE: September 2006

SEGA SEEMS TO BE going all-out for its sports titles to capitalise on the next-generation. *Virtua Tennis* and *Football Manager* have already had their next iterations announced for the PS3 and 360, now it's the turn of *World Snooker Championship*. The game boasts 102 of the world's top snooker players, as well as ten official tournaments in which you can try and beat the world's greats. Keeping with the ball-and-cue theme, you can also try out a bit of eight-ball against the top players of the pool world as well, plus several sanctioned tournaments from this branch of the sport. There will also be several modes to play in for that extra challenge, and playing against friends will also be available. The major benefit is that this will cost a lot less than getting an actual table, not to mention save a lot of room. You will be able to create a unique character, plus changes to the game engine allow for much better positioning of the cue ball.



WORLD AT WAR: A WORLD DIVIDED

DEVELOPER: 2 by 3 Games
PUBLISHER: Matrix Games
PLATFORM: PC
GENRE: Management
RELEASE DATE: 2006

WORLD AT WAR SURPRISED serious management enthusiasts, as you had to manage supplies, production, troop movements and resources to win the Second World War. The game carries on where the first left off, except that the Soviet Union is now squaring off against the Western allies in an alternative version to history. Fittingly, since this sounds similar to the Cold War, spies are new to the system, as are diplomacy, code-breaking, neutral units and political events. The turn-based system presents the world like a complicated *Risk* board, and for that *World At War* might appear to be very simplistic. But the first game demonstrated that this is actually quite complicated and a big challenge for gamers who like crunching numbers alongside their tactical decisions. Players with campaigns from the original title will be able to pick up where they left off, handing a whole new structure of strategy required. *World At War* is definitely a niche title, and it's good to see the first was enough of a success to warrant a sequel.



DIG DUG DIGGING STRIKE

DEVELOPER: Atari
PUBLISHER: Atari
PLATFORM: DS
GENRE: Platform
RELEASE DATE: 2006

DIG DUG RETURNS! THE classic series of a man who tunnels underground and dodges all kinds of strange monsters is making its debut on the dual-screen DS. As such, the first change is obvious – the game makes use of the two screens to full effect. The top is a 3D world map where *Dig Dug* (and a friend, via wireless) can move between different parts of an area. In total there will be 15 areas and over 80 screens to explore. The bottom screen takes us underground and combines the classic mechanics of the original game with new features incorporating the touch screen, including mini-games. These are basic versions of classic Namco games and will eventually help players break apart the islands and defeat the monsters underground. Item collection will also play a role, unlocking new features in the game. New monsters and bosses will appear, while *Dig Dug* has been armed with a wider variety of weapons. There are also more environmental hazards to use or fall trap to. Hopefully the DS will give the series a new resurgence.



ALONE IN THE DARK (360)

Presented in a TV-style episodic (in a single game) method, each time you quit, or save, you'll get to see a 'previously' clip or even a 'coming soon' trailer of what you will be playing in a few hour's time. The idea is cute, and the presentation, based on early art and trailers, is looking stunning (especially considering it's *Alone in the Dark*). Overall, this could be the return of the Western Survival Horror king, as long as they don't put too much Dark in there, though ample dosages of *Alone* will work wonders.



JOHN WOO'S STRANGLEHOLD (MULTI)

John Woo lives up to his surname and woos (sorry) gamers with his super, slow-motion, ass-kicking, hardboiled style, in a game. Yes, it's easily comparable to *Max Payne*, but since when did Remedy's masterpiece become something we don't want to see again? Fill up your special bar, and the tap of a key will unleash the lead protagonist into a flurry of cut scene-styled attacks on bad guys, complete with explosions of fluttering pigeons.



HELLGATE: LONDON [PC]

Hellgate is going to be something special for fans of games where killing monsters and collecting loot is half the fun; building up your character is the other. Will these former Blizzard developers have a few new tricks up their sleeves for the action RPG genre? After getting a first-hand look at the game, we can definitely say "yes" and add the game to our "Wanted" list with authority. Unfortunately, for it to really be worth your while, you'll need to get a broadband line, but LAN and single play is very robust as well.

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Developer

Dimps

Publisher

VU Games

Distributor

MI Digital

Genre

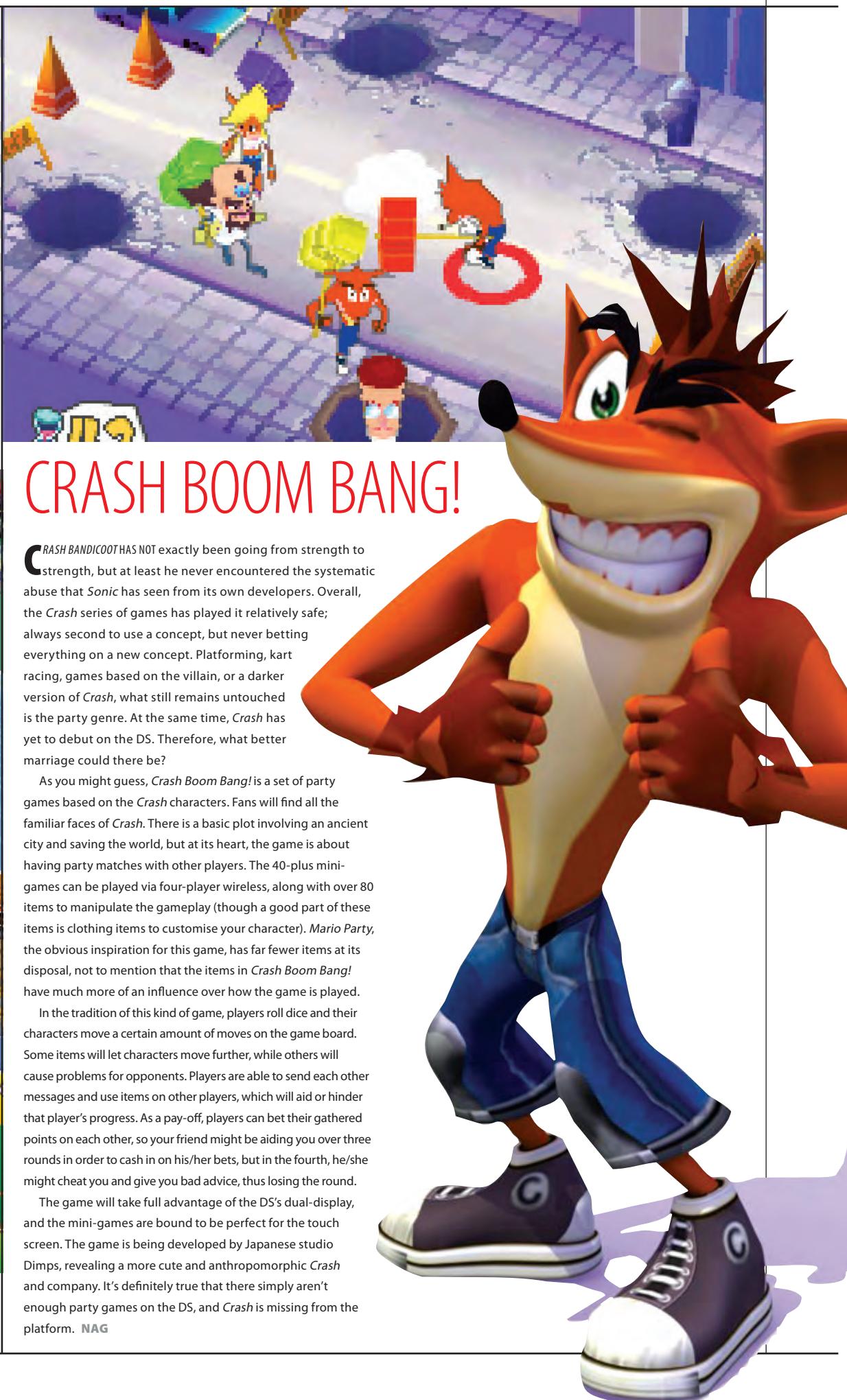
Party

Release Date

October 2006



Crash gets by with a little help from his friends in this party game



CRASH BOOM BANG!

CRASH BANDICOOT HAS NOT exactly been going from strength to strength, but at least he never encountered the systematic abuse that *Sonic* has seen from its own developers. Overall, the *Crash* series of games has played it relatively safe; always second to use a concept, but never betting everything on a new concept. Platforming, kart racing, games based on the villain, or a darker version of *Crash*, what still remains untouched is the party genre. At the same time, *Crash* has yet to debut on the DS. Therefore, what better marriage could there be?

As you might guess, *Crash Boom Bang!* is a set of party games based on the *Crash* characters. Fans will find all the familiar faces of *Crash*. There is a basic plot involving an ancient city and saving the world, but at its heart, the game is about having party matches with other players. The 40-plus mini-games can be played via four-player wireless, along with over 80 items to manipulate the gameplay (though a good part of these items is clothing items to customise your character). *Mario Party*, the obvious inspiration for this game, has far fewer items at its disposal, not to mention that the items in *Crash Boom Bang!* have much more of an influence over how the game is played.

In the tradition of this kind of game, players roll dice and their characters move a certain amount of moves on the game board. Some items will let characters move further, while others will cause problems for opponents. Players are able to send each other messages and use items on other players, which will aid or hinder that player's progress. As a pay-off, players can bet their gathered points on each other, so your friend might be aiding you over three rounds in order to cash in on his/her bets, but in the fourth, he/she might cheat you and give you bad advice, thus losing the round.

The game will take full advantage of the DS's dual-display, and the mini-games are bound to be perfect for the touch screen. The game is being developed by Japanese studio Dimps, revealing a more cute and anthropomorphic *Crash* and company. It's definitely true that there simply aren't enough party games on the DS, and *Crash* is missing from the platform. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

Tested on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	NGC

Developer

Ubisoft

Publisher

Ubisoft

Distributor

Megarom (011) 234-2680

Genre

Stealth/Action

Release Date

29 September 2006



SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

IT'S ABOUT TIME SAM Fisher got back into being the super-agent he is, instead of just parading around as an aging sneaky bastard.

Taking the series in a new direction, the entire premise of *Double Agent* is exactly that: being an agent for both sides at once. The NSA government agents and the terrorists you're trying to infiltrate both expect you to work for their sides, oblivious of your true intentions. True intentions, however, are left up to the player, but not without repercussions. Without weighing the consequences, you could land yourself in hot water with either side. Kill too many criminals and you'll blow your cover, take too long and millions of people will die because of a new (and missing) super weapon. A fresh diversion from what the previous three titles in the series set, *Double Agent* is looking to be *Splinter Cell* fans' *Splinter Cell*.

Possibly the result of early preview code, the PlayStation 2 version of *Double Agent* doesn't quite manage a smooth framerate – though this rarely matters due to the pacing of the game. Visually it manages to get the message across, although the dour and entirely immobile face of Sam does get disconcerting after a while – best to just keep the camera away from his face. The environments are detailed (at least the bits that are visible in the dark) in their own way, and the overall feel of each location is succinct.

More importantly, the control scheme seems to have been tightened up a touch and made slightly more intuitive, once you've finished watching all the various training videos that is. Lambert (your commander) doesn't



quite have the spark in his voice he should, though this might be re-recorded before release.

Thanks to the *Double Agent* mechanic, which manifests as a binary choice at critical junctions in the plot, the storyline branches into multiple endings. Each choice impacts on how the story pans out and how the gameplay continues. Your choices swing a bar towards either of the factions, which in turn influences which weapons become available to you. The NSA gadgets return, though by treading a fine line you can also get your hands on some black-market additions – very useful considering where Sam ends up in this chapter of the *Splinter Cell* saga. From Asia to Africa and right up to the heart of the US, it just wouldn't be *Splinter Cell* without exotic locations.

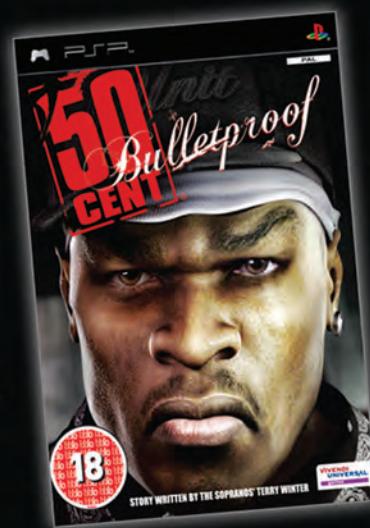
In an odd departure from the norm (and a tip of the hat perhaps to the *Metroid* series), once the basic move-sets are learned and the weapons are understood, Sam gets dumped in prison due to various (and important) reasons. No backup, no weapons, just your incredible ability to look stern and some fancy NSA training to kill and avoid capture. From there, every choice has an outcome and naturally, anything that would gain you trust with the faction, you're trying to infiltrate, will in turn land you in hot water with your supervisors – such is the life of a double agent, we're told.

The antiquated PlayStation 2 just cannot compete with its newer contenders, and *Double Agent* could well be the *magnum opus* of the series – much more so than *Pandora Tomorrow* or even *Chaos Theory*, despite both being pristine additions to Sam's entourage. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Sega of Japan

■ Publisher

Sega of Europe

■ Distributor

Ster Kinekor Games (011) 445-7900

■ Genre

Action

■ Release Date

2006



Great tattoos, stylish suits - the Yakuza are the real Made Men



YAKUZA

KOWN AS *RYU GA Gotoku* in Japan and already enjoying success, *Yakuza* is an 'authentic' tale of the Japanese mob, and more specifically one-time gangster Kiryu Kazuma. After serving 10 years for murder, Kiryu gets caught up in an underworld plot and a missing billion yen.

The English localisation has some big names attached. Mark Hamill voices Yakuza boss Majima who has a taste for violence, while Michael Madsen (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Sin City*) voices Yakuza bigwig Shimano. *Smallville*'s Michael Rosenbaum voices gangster Nishiki, Eliza Dushku (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) plays Yumi, while Rachel Leigh Cook (*She's All That*) plays hostess bar owner Reina.

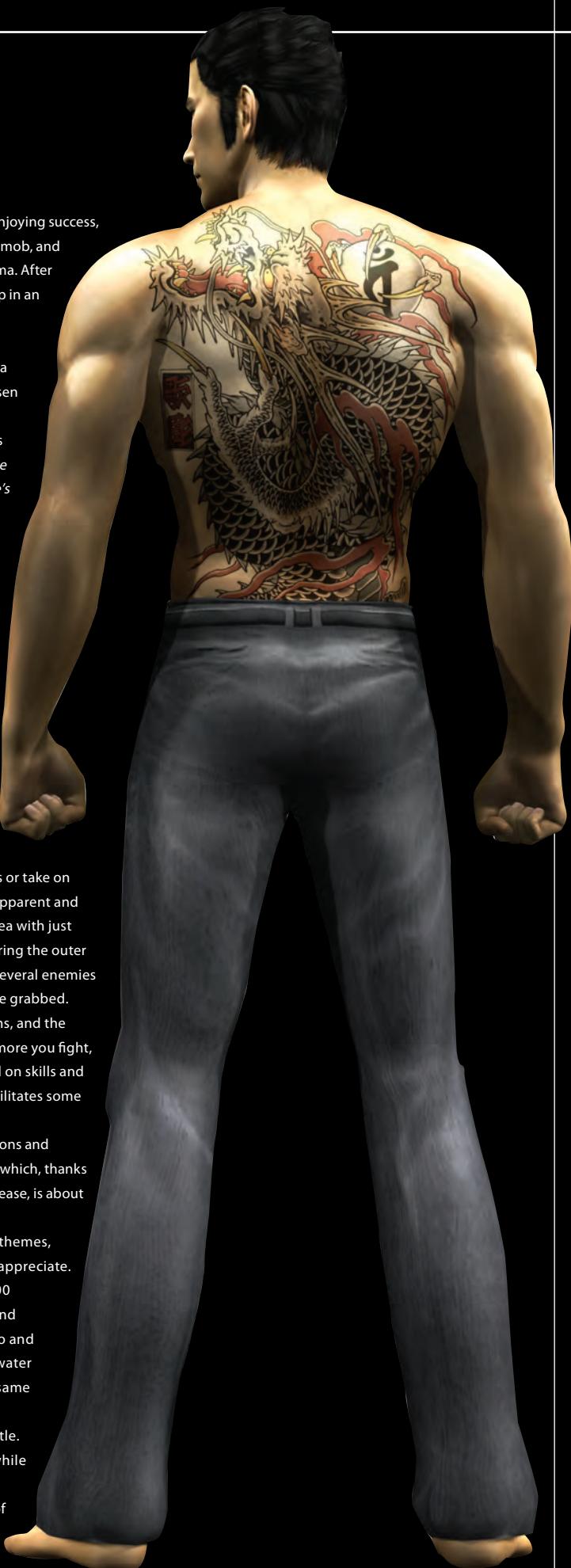
The game itself is an odd blend of *Grand Theft Auto* (minus the cars) and *Streets of Rage*, playing out across a very detailed and lively Toyko. The neon-lit streets and real-life shops all mix in with the bustling crowds to create something quite unique. The localisation seems to have handled the plot with the care and respect it deserves, and doesn't try to change it to a more Western pacing. Expect a lot of dialogue and exposition, which is required to create something of this depth, considering the subject matter.

The game involves Kiryu running around Toyko, through discreet streets and sections, reaching areas to complete objectives or take on enemies. The combat system seems the most apparent and polished, letting you rumble in an instanced area with just the enemies - bystanders do exactly that - and ring the outer edges of a combat situation. You can take out several enemies simultaneously or fling them into furniture once grabbed. Objects lying around make impromptu weapons, and the entire environment is pleasantly reactive. The more you fight, the stronger Kiryu becomes – points are placed on skills and stats. As you fight, a Heat Gauge fills up and facilitates some serious special moves.

On the side, little frivolities such as side-missions and gambling fill out an already appealing package, which, thanks to being a localisation and not an actual new release, is about as polished as you can get from a final product.

As with any game involving strong Eastern themes, *Yakuza* requires a specific type of patience to appreciate. The best correlation could be found in the 2000 crime movie *Brother* starring Tatyana Aliand and Joy Nakagawa. Directed by Beat Takeshi Kitano and themed around culture-clashing, fish-out-of-water *Yakuza*, *Brother* takes its inspiration from the same subject matter and themes as *Yakuza*.

The game systems alone make for a great title. The combat is rough, meaty and immediate, while graphically *Yakuza* presents possibly the most realistic view of Toyko, right down to crowds of umbrella-holding people when the rains start to fall. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Developer

Pandemic

Publisher

THQ

Distributor

Ster Kinekor Games (011) 445-7900

Genre

Action

Release Date

October 2006



Crypto is back with bigger weapons and genitals



DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

After taking the world by storm and selling over a million copies, Crypto is back to take on humanity again. The original *Destroy All Humans!* was a farcical look at alien invaders during the fifties, with a healthy dab of free-roaming elements thrown in. Sadly, the game fell short in this arena, unlike Pandemic's tour de force, *Mercenaries*. The levels were too limited and the game's structure was unable to handle a freeform world. But that just stopped an otherwise brilliant concept from becoming a classic title.

From this perspective, where *Destroy All Humans! 2* is heading it will definitely please fans and garner a bigger audience. Pandemic has approached the sequel in the tried-and-trusted manner of improving it and adding some polish. Citing the restrictions of the first game, the developers are eager to expand more into what they really wanted to do or thought of afterwards, complete with the same celebrated sense of humour. The fifties are done with and Crypto returns to the naughty sixties, complete with genitalia. This translates into more powers, including the ability to control other people. New weapons are also added to the mix. Some of these and other surprises can be bought in the Abduction Vault on the mother ship, and it gives Crypto the ability to use the Meteor Strike, basically a barrage from above.

The plot involves Crypto taking a plunge into the hedonism of the sixties, leaving behind any *Invader Zim* connotations from the first game. He's having fun, but the Cold War has started

and the Reds are spoiling his fun. In order to restore the balance and to lend a good amount of inspiration from *Austin Powers* and maybe *No One Lives Forever*, Crypto will face off against the Communist forces, though he's still not welcome in the other parts of the world either. So this will still involve more of the mayhem seen in the first game, except that men in black don't equate to Soviet invaders. Things take a turn for the global as players will hop from hippy hotspot Haight Ashbury in San Francisco to London, Tokyo and Siberia, to name a few locations. And in addition to all the extended madness, Crypto now has a cohort, allowing for co-op play through the entire campaign.

This alludes to much bigger play areas with more variety and less restriction in the mission tree. Obviously, the game won't incorporate a full world to explore, mainly because the theme would just make it too complicated or short lived. Still, with bigger arsenals and co-op support, the levels are likely to be huge in comparison with the original. Missions are now found by scanning the minds of the population of the area. Most will be inane banter, but some will present new opportunities to the player. Hopefully this will also include a quick mission selection system, though finding hidden adventures will have its own charm.

Destroy All Humans! 2 holds a lot of promise to fix problems of the original game, but whether it is going to be a decisive step forward or a chapter of finding its way forward remains to be seen. But even at its worse, the first title in the series was still entertaining. It's unlikely fans will be disappointed.. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Developer

Frontier Developments

Publisher

LucasArts

Distributor

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Management

Release Date

November 2006

Design it, build it, then play on it in Thrillville




THRILLVILLE

MANAGEMENT GAMES HAVE ALWAYS been most comfortable in the domain of the PC. This is especially true for the higher management sims such as *City Life*. *Theme Park*, arguably the originator of the Tycoon genre, appeared on the Amiga and 3DO alongside DOS systems, and on the Jaguar and Genesis the next year. However, these titles never managed to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the more action-orientated console games. Well, if the mountain won't come to Muhammad, then Muhammad will go to the mountain.

British developer Frontier Developments, headed by industry veteran David Braben, already has *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* to its name for this specific arena. Braben himself has significant simulation experience in the RT games, along with *Dog's Life* and the legendary *Elite*.

Thrillville is supposed to overcome the console/control hump by steering management more towards what attracts you to such a title. Console gamers usually don't mind tinkering away for hours if there is a reward at the end of it. In the case of such a scenario, Frontier came up with the idea to focus more on the party aspect of consoles. You build a theme park, so surely you should be able to play in it.

Spread over 15 types of themes such as Wild West, Ancient

Egypt and the Moon, there will be 150 missions to complete. The park is constructed with stalls and rides, the latter of which players can build themselves. This will use around 75 ride types and span all the popular types, including rollercoaster. In this tradition, the rollercoasters can also be ridden. But the party aspect comes in with the midway games. Of these there are 22, 18 of which will be for multiplayer. Up to four players will be able to take part in these games, giving your park a party mood and hand visitors something to do.

But it's a Tycoon game and keeping the park running is what keeps players in the green. A persistent player character can be designed and changed through the course of the game. He or she can also maintain basic relationships with the park regulars and citizens. It will be interesting to see how much detail happens at this level, but while roaming a park's streets isn't a new concept, it certainly can do with more improvement.

As the game is being specifically tailored for the PlayStation 2, Xbox and PSP, it hands new challenges for the development crew. However, considering their past experience in this field, it looks like they have a few new ideas to bring along as well. *Thrillville* might be a surprise for the console world. **NAG**





A Gun in a Knife Fight



REVIEWS

WEB SCORES

TITAN QUEST [PC]

NAG [100]	88
Metacritic [100]	77
Gamerankings [100]	80



NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. [DS]

NAG [100]	90
Metacritic [100]	89
Gamerankings [100]	89



THE DA VINCI CODE [PC]

NAG [100]	15
Metacritic [100]	54
Gamerankings [100]	54



ROCKSTAR PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS [360]

NAG [100]	90
Metacritic [100]	81
Gamerankings [100]	83



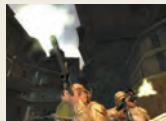
GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES [PS2]

NAG [100]	60
Metacritic [100]	77
Gamerankings [100]	77



FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS [PC]

NAG [100]	69
Metacritic [100]	70
Gamerankings [100]	69



URBAN CHAOS [PS2]

NAG [100]	80
Metacritic [100]	73
Gamerankings [100]	73



METROID PRIME: HUNTERS [DS]

NAG [100]	82
Metacritic [100]	86
Gamerankings [100]	85



The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh. All scores were correct at time of printing.

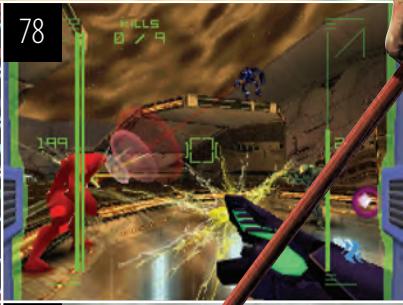
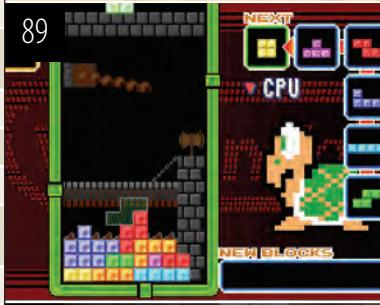
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84	Rockstar Presents Table Tennis	[360]
86	GTA: Liberty City Stories	[PS2]
86	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	[PC]
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88	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	[PS2]
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90	World Racing 2	[PS2]
92	The Da Vinci Code	[PC]
93	Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code	[PSP]
94	Asterix and the Vikings	[MOB]
94	Goodfellas	[MOB]
94	Driver Vegas	[MOB]
96	Budget: Baldur's Gate 4-in-1 Box Set	[PC]
96	Budget: Devil May Cry 3 Special Edition	[PC]
97	Budget: GTA: San Andreas Platinum	[PS2]

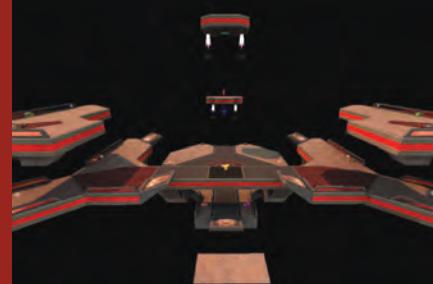
74 X 27



380



WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...



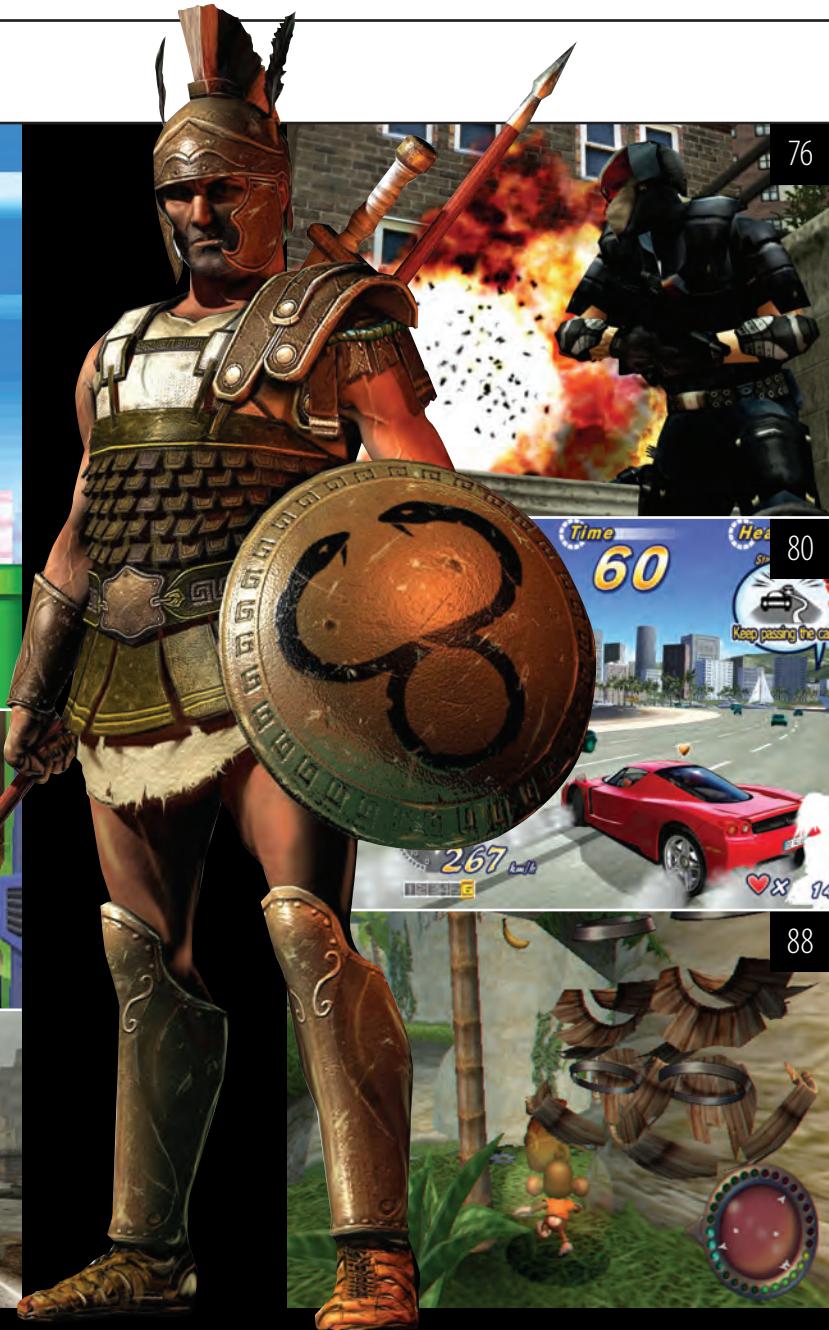
QUAKE III CTF (PC)

Due to a little office tournament between the forces of the malignant Red Team and the honourable actions of the powerful Blue Team, *Quake III CTF* has seen a revival at the NAG office. Vanilla *Quake III CTF* is still one of the best CTF incarnations aside from the now legendary Threewave CTF for *Quake II*. If only CTF hadn't fallen by the wayside as all these new upstart game modes started being introduced.



TITAN QUEST (PC)

Just call it *Diablo 3* and play it – that's what you're supposed to do. Obviously inspired by/homage to *Diablo 2*, *Titan Quest* combines all the best elements of *Diablo 2* and *Sacred* into one wholesome package, one that has the entire office clicking away with carpal tunnel syndrome into the depths of the night. Anyone got the Lazarus set? Looking for the helmet...

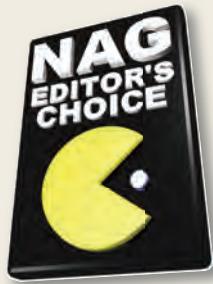


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AWARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

This prestigious award gets bestowed upon games that really catch NAG's collective eye. The Editor's Choice award is for games that have some indefinable trait that just make them stand head and shoulders above the rest, peering about nervously. Usually, games that are fun, visually stunning and which leave a lasting impression are honoured with the coveted Editor's Choice. It's almost similar to knighthood, but not as humiliating!



CLASSIC AWARD

Any game that scores above 85% gets the much-envied Classic Award in honour of its achievement. Above 85% represents a game that has managed to set itself apart from the crowd of mediocrity – a game worthy of some attention. Games awarded the Classic Award are games you can trust.



SCORING

NAG is different, NAG is special. We score games on the 50% principle, meaning that we regard 50% as 'average'. It's neither here, nor there. 50% is the perfect middle ground. A game that scores 50% is a game that does nothing wrong, but nothing right either. If a game won't install properly, naturally it scores less than 50%. If a game brings something new to the table, or does what it does well, it'll go up from the 50% average. 60% is above average, a game that might appeal to some. 70% is a game that's pushing its own limits slightly, one that's perhaps putting a new spin on common ideas. 80% represents a game with a difference, one of quality and as few rough edges as possible. 90% is outstanding, a game that has separated itself from the horde to do its own thing, and does it well. No game will ever achieve 100%, because if a game ever did, we'd be out of jobs. Nobody would play anything else anyway.



GUILD WARS Factions (PvP) (PC)

Recently, a much-reformed Miktar started dabbling in PvP again, hitting the Random Arena in the *Factions* PvP side. Assigned a random bunch of people, the goal is to try and get as high a consecutive winning streak as possible – not always easy when people don't defend Monks or insist on rushing in like blind fools. Remember, in an even battle (or even pitched) patience wins over skill.



PREY (PC)

With all the rhubarb-custard going on about Valve's new FPS *Portal*, most people have forgotten where the idea comes from. This little '1994 designed but 2006 released' gaming phoenix has managed to grab the attention of anyone playing it, and doesn't let go until the final credit has rolled and you're surprised at what happens beyond that...



Contents of package may differ...

HIMSELF (REDTIDE)

The pinnacle of the Survival Horror genre, *RedTide*, has found much enjoyment in playing with himself. He hopes to purchase several expansion packs later to augment his enjoyment, though everyone at the office is thinking he's become a little too obsessive about playing this new game of his, involving himself. We're thankful that the developers decided to make it a single-player game, because we don't think we could handle playing it multiplayer with *RedTide*.

TITAN



WELL, IT'S *DIABLO* AND *Dungeon Siege* set in ancient Greece. *Titan Quest* is a no nonsense hack and slash RPG that borrows more than its fair share from the great classics. Jaded gamers might sneer at all that is familiar about this game, but true fans of the genre are going to absolutely love it. The story is told via a short introduction movie, and is picked up as you go by various interactions with non-playing characters you'll meet along the way. Many people in the towns and villages you pass through have their own take on things, and some even have side-quests for you to perform for small rewards.

The main story arc is completed by following the main quest to set things right in the game world. You can ignore these side-quests if you like, but where's the fun in that. Each town has a portal that you can connect to anywhere in the game world via the portal system. If you fill up with treasure and need to get back to sell it, simply click on the portal icon and one will appear, allowing you to instantly travel back to any town of your choosing. You'll have to do this frequently because this game drops a ton of junk with each successful battle. Many items are worthless, but some are special, and will make all the difference when dishing out the pain.

The inventory system is a little short on depth as you can initially only carry limited quantities, but this improves slightly as you complete the main quests and are awarded extra space. While you play, you'll be able to gain experience that you can then assign to various character statistics such as health and strength.

How you play and enhance certain skills, determine what you'll eventually become. The game also offers masteries that you can allocate skill points to. You'll only be able to select two different masteries, so choose wisely. Skill points are hard to come by, so it's best to focus on one of the two masteries, as trying to cover everything will leave you wanting on the battlefield. Besides these unique features, the game has everything you could possibly want, including pets you can summon under the masteries, as well as relics you can combine with weapons or armour to improve their effectiveness.

The game is also surprisingly large and will take you in excess of forty hours to complete (at least), and more if you decide to take everything in and do all the side-quests. This is even more impressive if you consider all the variation on offer here. You'll keep seeing new and different creatures to kill right up to the end of the game, as well as lovely looking locations to explore. The game is a little buggy in terms of the engine. Things are choppy even at the lowest settings and the game tends to lag here and there.

The game does feel a little too linear and formulaic at times, but the experience is still compelling and unforgettable and there isn't much out there these days that can entertain as well as this. The other complaint taking a little away from the experience is that the game is rather easy to exploit. If you build a strong pet, for example, you really have little work to do as you play through it, but much of this depends on how you play it. At the end of the day, if you enjoyed *Diablo* or *Dungeon Siege*, make sure you get this one. *Titan Quest* is highly enjoyable and definitely worth the price of admission.

QUEST™



VITAL INFO

Platforms	PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
	XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299.00

Developer

Iron Lore Entertainment

Publisher

THQ

Supplier

WWE (011) 462-0150

Genre

RPG

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.8GHz

Video: 64MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 5GB HDD

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not Required

Players: 6



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BOTTOM LINE

It's everything a hack and slash RPG should be, and more. If you're tired of waiting for *Diablo III* then this is the mustard. If you're a huge fan of this genre, then bump the score up to 96. It's epic, amazing and will take you ages to complete, which is the best part.

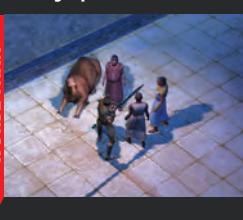
88/100

BETTER THAN



Nothing tops this

WORSE THAN



DIARY SECTION

THIS IS THE QUEST DIARY OF A HERO. IT WAS FOUND NEAR EGYPT UNDERNEATH A PILE OF RAGS AND BLOODY BONES. WE HAVE NO IDEA WHERE IT CAME FROM OR IF THE WRITER IS STILL AROUND. IF YOU KNOW THE AUTHOR OR ARE THE OWNER OF THIS DIARY, PLEASE CONTACT IMHOTEP, THE PYRAMID OF DJOSER, SAQQARA, EGYPT.

DAY 3

I've just arrived at this new town. Everyone is looking terrified and they're all talking about monsters and strange creatures. It looks like I've come to the right place. After nailing that swine Diablo a few years ago and completing a handful of novice quests around my old town, this place sounds like it's going to hell. Perfect!

DAY 4

Every time I get to a new town they always ask the same question, "How is it that you came to be here, didn't the monsters kill you?" To make matters worse, everyone and their pack mule has a little job for me to do. I feel like the tea girl at a recruitment agency. Everyone has a small job for me, but nobody wants to keep me. For some reason, everyone is telling me about what happened in the past - folklore and other strange tales. Although these stories are fascinating, I've stopped talking to strangers unless they're offering gold for services. I honestly don't need a reason to bash in a few skulls, and at night, I just want to eat and sleep. Call me a savage and you call me right.

DAY 14

I'm about to start my quest. I've decided to study the Earth mastery for this outing. I like the sound of the Core Dweller creature I should be able to eventually summon. I like having a big dumb brute for company on these quests, and he definitely sounds the business. I wonder if I'll get a girl and then how the hell am I going to tell the difference? I miss two things here in Greece: no pack animals to carry all my toys, and no safety deposit box anywhere. I guess it looks like I'm going to have to keep trekking backwards and forwards between hostile monster territory and town to sell what I find. This is what you get when you visit Third World countries – no services. This place is nothing like Tristram. Well, tomorrow is the big day. I'm going to sharpen my sword tonight and bang out those dents in my shield and maybe even read up a little more on summoning this Core Dweller. I have a good feeling about this.

DAY 18

Things have been going well. There're so many monsters everywhere, I don't think I've ever seen this many in one place before, and they're all so different. I'm even thinking of sketching all the different types and maybe selling a strategy guide to other adventurers that come this way - you know; weak spots, typical treasure drops, what to avoid, and which weapon dishes out the most damage. I haven't really been challenged yet. They seem to attack in great numbers to make up for their lack of proficiency. I'm sure this will change, it always does.



Lava Boy and I, we've settled our differences in this picture, but he knows not to dick me around anymore



This is me and old fart. He gave me a big quest but didn't pay up when I got back. You'll find him in an unmarked grave just outside town. If you're a relative you'll have to check the dental records



The weirdest thing happened here. I stepped on the town portal and was suddenly in a room with a bunch of guys in red suits [one of them was called Scotty]. They put up a hell of fight, but I don't think they were ready for Lava Boy, nobody ever is really



This is what I'll be having for dinner tonight, some Nile crocodile soup



DAY 31

I've just entered a cave with my Core Dweller. He really does most of the work these days while I just stop in and pick up items. If I'm lucky, I also get to kill the occasional monster, but I'm not complaining. I like my pet – he rocks. Well, he actually is a bunch of rocks joined together by lava. I mean, how much tougher can you get: made of the hardest stuff around and then joined together by the only stuff that can melt it. I've pumped plenty of time and effort into him right from the start because I knew I might need a little help on this one. Truthfully, I'm lazy at heart and love having a servant running around doing all the dirty work – think of me as the mob boss of the quest world.

DAY 40

My Core Dweller turned on me today. He came at me raising his fists in anger, murderous intent in his eyes. It wasn't the pet I knew. I was shocked and disappointed knowing I would have to put him down one way or the other. I can now understand that dead-hearted dread you must feel when a tiger that you've hand-raised from birth suddenly and terrifyingly turns on you. What happened was that a particularly nasty and magical character cast a spell that turned my pet against me for a short amount of time. I thought he was tougher than that, the wimp. So now, I quest without my pet monster. I've reallocated (at great cost) all the time I lovingly gave to the pet and put it into something more reliable – me. I may get another pet, but it won't be Lava Boy – he's weak minded and I don't like the feeble of mind at my back.

DAY 99

I've discovered another interesting twist. I've been collecting these relic fragments and yesterday I found the last piece to complete a set. The thing

REVIEW

melded together and can now be used to enhance my sword. It feels lighter and faster somehow, and seems to be dishing out much more punishment. It's great and I must remember to keep a few of these things for my next adventure. Where would we be without magic?

DAY 121

Not getting the kind of drops I'm used to these days - my karma must be down or something. All I'm picking up these days is health potions and rusty swords, not the kind of reward you need after slugging through a few tons of monster meat. Perhaps tomorrow will be better. What I'm really looking for are special items that'll actually fetch me some decent money at the trader, or if they're good enough, I'll just keep them. At this stage, finding special items is the only way to go because the traders don't seem to carry anything decent.

DAY 122

Damn, I was just killed – damn trap shot a fireball at me while my health was low. Thankfully, I touched a Rebirth Fountain not too long ago and was resurrected immediately. I've lost some experience in the process and for some strange reason, the whole area between my resurrection point and where I died is full of monsters again. As an upside, there's new treasure everywhere. It's almost as though everything has been reset. I guess this is one of the penalties of dying, and you can't have your squid cupcake and eat it. This got me thinking I should take another look at that cave I cleaned out yesterday. It was as tough as hell, but the item drops were brilliant. If I went back there, I might find more goodies and get a replacement for this shield.



This is my favourite town trader. You just won't believe the size of the man tits on this guy



I'm almost sure I've seen a movie like this before, one with giant bugs in the desert. The name escapes me though





Now this guy was a little odd. After speaking to him I offered him a bunch of carrots and he got all annoyed and left in a huff mumbling something



MULTIPLAYER AND MORE

For those of you with enough friends, *Titan Quest* also supports up to six players cooperatively. The game world adjusts to cater for the extra firepower, and there's just no better way to quest through this game than with a few mates. It's the kind of experience where you'll end up talking about a particular game session during coffee breaks. The developers have also been kind enough to include all the tools they used to put the game together on the DVD. This is excellent news, because we'll soon be seeing many new maps, quests and monsters to battle against in the years to come, and we all know that sometimes the community does a better job than the original developers.

DAY 124

I went back to the cave and yes indeed, I found a great cleaver. It has all sorts of inscriptions all over it, but it wasn't that special and none of the relics worked on it. I also ran into a few strange mechanical soldiers - hard to kill, but they're a little slow.

DAY 150

I've killed around seven thousand monsters so far. Things are getting tougher, but I'm also getting stronger, and Lava Boy (I caved and summoned him again) is also carving through the bad guys like never before. Tomorrow we tackle the next piece of some quest item. The old guy who sent me on this mission promised a great reward. It had better be good after all of this, or he'll end up like that last old fool who wasted my time.

DAY 159

I've been in Egypt for a few weeks now and I must tell you the pyramids are amazing. Overloaded with goodies and things to kill, these skeletons are fun to kill. One swipe of my mallet and parts go flying – very gratifying. All is well. I've completed a number of side-quests. You know; cleaned up our town, found my brother and killed those monsters eating our children. The pay sucks, but occasionally you'll be given a decent ring or charm. The deserts are ridiculous. Every time I get to the top of a pile of dead creatures, another ten are already headed my way. My arms ache at night and I have to keep checking the slicing edge of my blade. **NAG**



VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R295

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Supplier

Nintendo (011) 256-7760

Genre

Platformer

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Memory: 90KB

Players: 1 - 2

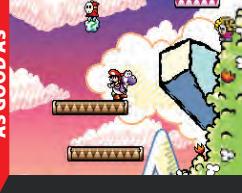
Online: No

Wireless: Yes

DS Download: Yes

**BOTTOM LINE**

It's the magic of *Super Mario Bros* all over again, redesigned for a new generation of future *Mario* fans. It's platforming at its best, despite the halcyon nature of the franchise.

90/100*Super Mario World (SNES)**Yoshi's Island (SNES)***BETTER THAN****AS GOOD AS**

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

WHEN YOU LOOK AT the length of time that has passed since 1983, it is amazing that *Mario Bros* can still be around and manage to entertain. Mario and his greener brother Luigi make a return to their roots (in a much more official way) with *New Super Mario Bros*, and the effect is quite appealing.

To consider *New Super Mario Bros* a kind of 'best of' collection of ideas wouldn't be too far-fetched. The game borrows heavily from every *Mario* game before it, right back to the original 1983 *Mario Bros* arcade machine that predated the console releases. For returning fans, the halcyon meander down memory lane is pleasing and not overly challenging (except when attempting to reach the more difficult levels). Newcomers might think that *Super Mario Bros* has become antiquated along with the platforming genre, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The most immediate homage to *Mario Bros* 3 is that of how the game is segmented and divided across the worlds. There are 80 levels divided between the eight worlds (Plains, Desert, Tropical Island, Forest, Ice, Mountains, Sky, and Koopa Kingdom), with multiple branching paths, secrets

and other elements such as mobile Question blocks that can add some spice to a level. There are also Mushroom houses that yield quick games of chance to net several 1-UP mushrooms. Other elements taken from *Mario*'s more recent 2D and 3D titles, include the addition of the ability to ground-pound (*Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*), and triple jump and wall jump (*Super Mario 64*). Quite a few enemies have also made the transition, including sharks and eels in the underwater levels, as well as a poignant homage to Dorrie from *Super Mario 64*. Overzealous fan boys will no doubt grin with glee at the sheer amount of *Mario* madness in *New Super Mario Bros*, but truthfully, why not?

The game contains all the usual platforming elements such as running, jumping and making deft, calculated leaps into oblivion, followed by cursing. Breaking this tradition, the power-ups have been given a few boosts, namely the Mini and Mega Mushroom power-ups. The Mini makes Mario (or Luigi, once you know how to unlock the Green Machine) very tiny indeed, netting the unexpected benefits of much slower falling (floating) as well as being able to





reach passages that require a diminutive stature. The Mega is more of a wanton destructive power-up, making Mario large enough to just walk right through obstructions with a satisfying crunch. The more scenery you destroy, the more 1-UPs fall from the sky when the Mega wears off. If one is not careful, however, you can destroy an element that is required to reach a secret or an alternate path through the level. Restarting the level cures all ailments, however, and death is tempered by a single midway checkpoint that appears once reached.

The plot, naturally, involves Bowser capturing the Princess and running off to a castle, although, without giving anything away, the formula doesn't quite follow the 'Your Princess is in another Castle' canon. Discovering the additions, changes and ideas behind *New Super Mario Bros* is half the fun, while trying to reach paths and levels you can see but have no idea how to get to, is another considerable half.

There are also several secrets to unlock, codes you can enter to either play as Luigi or to make the game touch more 'traditional'. Frivolity includes purchasing new wallpapers for the title screen. The touch screen itself is rarely used (except in the multiplayer mini-

games), although a single power-up is stored on the bottom screen (the game plays out on the top screen), which, when touched, will drop into the level. The bottom screen holds a timeline for the level showing you how far to the end you are, as well as indicating how many Star Coins you have. There are three Star Coins per level, and collecting these will allow you to unlock new paths (usually at the cost of five coins) to levels and/or bonus areas.

The entire *New Super Mario Bros* experience is one of quality, nostalgia and fun, with quite a liberal dose of challenge if the player desires to pursue the harder to reach worlds. Despite Mario and other characters being fully 3D, they are still constrained to a 2D side-view plane to keep things traditional, though the smoothness in animation is a nice benefit to the characters being more modern. The DS offers up *New Super Mario Bros* with no slow-downs, jerking or any other niggles, making *New Super Mario Bros* a must-have for fans of the series.

For the more cynical, naturally *Mario Bros* is still the same *Mario* we've known for the last 23 years - a happy Italian plumber who just wants to save his Princess from the evil Bowser. **NAG**



MULTIPLAYER

There are two multiplayer modes to *New Super Mario Bros*, and both can be played using only one cartridge for two people, or if both players have the game, the loading times are much shorter. The first mode involves Mario and Luigi squaring off across one of five levels in an attempt to collect stars, either by jumping on each other, collecting enough coins or just by grabbing ones that appear randomly. This mode is fun and frantic, not to mention a novel implementation of platforming ideas in multiplayer.

The second mode is more of a party-game, using the various mini-games that were in *Mario 64*. A spinner randomly selects a mini-game (played with the touch screen), and the person with the highest score at the end of a series of these wins.

VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R465

Developer

Rocksteady Studios

Publisher

Eidos

Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

18

Specifications

Memory: 90KB

Players: 2-8 players online

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A solid, if short, action title for gamers who want to deal with bad guys the hard way

80/100**Snowblind****Black****WORSE THAN****BETTER THAN**

URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE, THIS is the secret ingredient to any game where you expect your guns to do the talking. The formula seems incredibly simple: turn a place upside down with bad guys, load the player up with weaponry and let justice do the rest. But action games aren't really that simple. Like a good movie from the same genre, pacing is everything. Some settings allow for a more paced approach, others expect you to go in guns blazing. Moreover, let us be honest: it's all been done before. All, except for a big riot shield.

In all fairness, to break *Urban Chaos* down to the riot shield is a bit unfair. There is more to the game than simply having an indestructible wall between you and the bad guys, but it makes or breaks the game. It's a world gone crazy when protagonist Nick Mason arrives at his home city, but he returns as part of T-Zero, a 'zero tolerance' anti-riot unit that is taking on a series of violent gang attacks by a group called The Burners. These hockey-mask wearing thugs are eager to kill and shoot, hack, punch and Molotov their way towards the emergency personnel trying to save lives and the city. Some might point to *Urban Chaos*'s plot as being a bit gung-ho for the current mood of the world, but it is foremost an action game, and while excitable phrases like 'terrorists' slip out every now and then, you are really facing off against maniac gang members who kill without discrimination. Thankfully, Nick is given the same privilege and T-Zero brutality is handed out as often as possible during the game. At times Nick is joined by a cop, paramedic or firefighters, each who usually play a specific role. A firefighter can break open doors, douse fires and carry out hurt civilians. Police officers provide cover fire, while paramedics provide health and can tend to injured characters. The moments where these characters come into play are very specific, since the game is very linear. In fact, enemy placement doesn't change at all, nor do any of the other dynamics of the level.

But that is part of the game's charm. *Urban Chaos* quickly hands you a riot shield, one tough piece of modern plastic that

can take beatings from hatchets, guns, firebombs, grenades, rocket launchers and even Gatling-guns. The shield can be swung in front with the press of a button, providing cover in tight situations. One example is walking into a room, shield raised, and waiting for the three or four assailants to run out of ammo. When one does, the shield can be dropped and a quick shot usually disposes of a perpetrator or a grenade can be thrown over the top. If a bad guy gets too close, a shield bash can do a lot of damage. But the real catch is that the shield cuts down on the need to strafe and gives you more time to approach a situation and take out any Burners bunkered in.

This naturally gets tougher the further the game progresses. Gang members are fond of trying to beat the shield out of the way, and the extra cover is compensated for with more and more enemies, often sporting high-powered weapons that the shield deflects with ease, but also pushes you, causing



some disorientation. Later, opponents even sport their own shields, while rocket launchers and other high-impact weapons really push you backwards. The levels are linear and involve a bit of backtracking, but this is handled well and it feels as if you are doing something, not simply mindlessly killing bad guys. Often you have to protect a paramedic or escort a firefighter to a trapped civilian in a burning building. All, of course, while mindlessly killing bad guys. There are bonus situations; a handy stun gun can disable a perpetrator, awarding you with a non-violent arrest. Gang leaders need to be taken out in this fashion to unlock special timed missions. Finish these and you unlock new or improved weaponry. There are also hostage situations, which are slightly more intense sections that require a quick and accurate aim.

Sheree J. Wilson (*Walker, Texas Ranger*), a newscaster reporting on the latest news to befall the city, introduces each story level. The levels can be replayed, in case you accidentally shoot a gang leader, but the real appeal is to meet the three objectives per level: a certain amount of head shots; a certain amount of non-lethal arrests; recovery of all the hidden gang masks; and not using any check points. Each award you with a medal, and once you collect a certain amount, you automatically get awarded with more ammo, improved weapons and armour. It doesn't change the game, except up the odds in your favour, but these are fun incentives to achieve.

On top of all this is a pretty gripping game. *Urban Chaos*, while not extremely deep or intelligent, keeps the variation going with the different locations as well as constantly upping the action and violence quota. It lives in the tradition of *Black* and *Killzone*, though does things its way – a way that involves a really big shield and thoroughly relentless gangsters. Unfortunately, the game is a bit short-lived and lacks a final punch at the end. Nevertheless, if you are yearning for an all-out action romp, you can't go very wrong with *Urban Chaos*. **NAG**



VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R295

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256-7760

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Wireless: Yes

DS Download: Yes

Players: 1-4

METROID PRIME HUNTERS

ALONG WITH THE NEW Nintendo DS came a demo titled *Metroid Prime: First Hunt*. Featuring the now traditional Prime 'first person' view from behind the eyes of bounty hunter Samus Aran, *First Hunt* proved (for the most part) that the DS could do a first-person shooter as well as any console or computer counterpart.

Hunters is *First Hunt* completed, and is both a first-person shooter and an adventure game. *Metroid Prime Hunters* is also the third first-person game, the second multiplayer game and the first online multiplayer game in the *Metroid* series.

The graphical style and level design in *Hunters* emulate *Metroid Prime* perfectly, and while the game engine isn't as powerful or beefy as its bigger brothers are, the single-player portion still manages to be as detailed and puzzle-centric as previous games in the series.

The biggest hurdle to *Hunters* is getting to grips with the control scheme (there are four variations, divided between left- and right-handed configurations). You can either use the stylus or thumb strap in place of a mouse, or you can aim using the A/B/X/Y buttons as a second 'D-pad', though this method is much less accurate. Using the thumb strap on the bottom screen and leaving movement/strafing to the D-pad works wonders. Left Shoulder fires, although to jump you have to double-tap the screen. Having jump on the Right Shoulder would have worked much better (though Jump is on the Right Shoulder when using the A/B/X/Y aiming mode). The game supports the odd optional DS Rumble Pak, a GBA cartridge that slots into the GBA port to add some feedback.

The single-player portion spans several planets that Samus visits, and includes a liberal dose of navigation and discovery, instead of just all-out run-and-gun. There is a good deal of shooting, however, with no lock-on to make matters easier, though lock-on is simply not required when you have the accuracy of the touch screen aiming.

**BOTTOM LINE**

A decent enough FPS for the DS, which, despite a slightly uncomfortable control scheme, still manages to hit the Deathmatch nail on the head. Internet play is stable and mostly lag-free, though Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection can sometimes be stubborn.

82/100**Coded Arms (PSP)**

BETTER THAN

Metroid Prime: Echoes

WORSE THAN



Mario Kart DS, doesn't feature any restrictions on maps, modes or options. All the characters (Samus and newer additions) are selectable for multiplayer, although additional characters need to be unlocked via the single-player or by defeating them in multiplayer. Players downloading from someone with the game (single-cart play) can only select Samus.

The Multiplayer Mode is as detailed as any counterpart is, and even includes voice chat in the lobby (using the built-in microphone). Players can chat before a match, though voice-chat is disabled when the game begins. *Hunters* also manages full online stat tracking, with a stat representing how often a player remains in a game instead of disconnecting before losing.

Fans of *Nintendogs* will recognise the 'Rival Radar' function as similar to 'Bark Mode'. A player sets their DS to Rival Radar and shuts it, carrying it along. If they pass another player whose DS has been set to Rival Radar mode, both players will automatically be registered in each other's multiplayer Rival List. The Rival List can be used to quickly find these players to play against online, or for an impromptu match right there and then.

Your stats (a rather impressive collection of information) is viewable on the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection Website, along with a leader board of the top ten scores in categories such as headshots, number of kills and so forth.

Without a doubt (and until something better comes along) *Metroid Prime Hunters* is an exemplary multiplayer game for the Nintendo DS - lag-tolerant in respect to connections and capable of serious four-way deathmatch and more, such as capture the flag, last man standing, king of the hill and 'prime hunter'. The latter involves one player having the prime hunter designation and has to hold it for as long as possible, while others attempt to kill and take the title. Team play can be set for the appropriate game types and the host can set point limits, time limits and even restrict the use of the radar. Bots can be added to play against and the bots themselves offer quite a challenge.

The *First Hunt* demo is a great way to see if you'll enjoy the feel and control scheme of *Hunters* before you make a purchase, so use that option to make sure you're not getting into something you just can't enjoy due to mechanics or finger-cramps. **NAG**

CHARACTERS

Samus Aran: Favourite blond-haired (originally) bounty hunter and orphaned wielder of the Chozo Power Suit. The Galactic Federation loves Samus, and she clashes with Space Pirates a lot. Metroids often feature in her escapades, though her Missile Launcher usually makes short work of those.

Noxus: This Vhozon bounty hunter is something of an overzealous 'law enforcer'. He seeks the Alimbics' ultimate power in service of justice, and intends to keep it safe from evil hands and the unworthy. He can turn into a bladed spinning top.

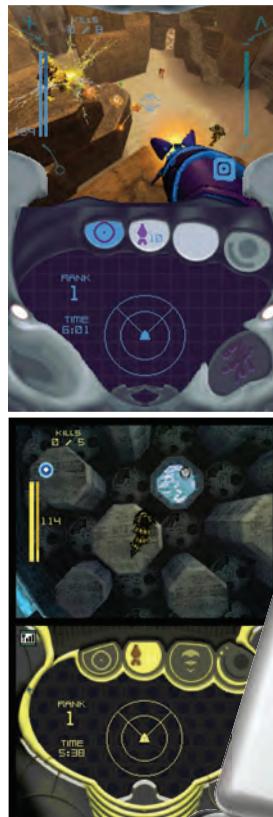
Sylux: Little is known about Sylux. It is only known that he hates the Federation and Samus Aran by association.

Spire: The last of the Diamonds, a silicon based species. He believes finding the power of the Alimbics will help him solve the mystery of what happened to his own race. Spire, naturally, is immune to lava.

Trace: A Kriken of the despised Kriken Empire, undergoing his rite of passage into adulthood. He searches for a planet that the Krikens can invade.

Kanden: A lab experiment gone awry. Insane and power-hungry, he searches for the secrets of the Alimbics to prove himself the strongest bounty hunter.

Weavel: A Space Pirate assassin whom Samus left for dead after a battle at Brinstar. Only his brain and spinal cord remained intact, which the Space Pirates effectively attached to a life support system and Weavel was reborn as a cyborg. It is unknown where his loyalties lie, though he remains with the Space Pirates as long as it suits his interests.



VITAL INFO**Platforms**

Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX 360	DS	MOB	

Suggested Retail Price

R270

Developer

Sumo Digital

Publisher

Sega

Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

Genre

Racing

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.3GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 256MB RAM

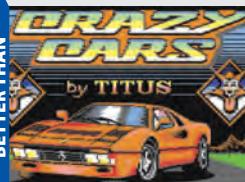
CD/DVD: CD/DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required

Players: 1-6

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Outrun is practically a genre of its own – the definitive arcade racer revitalised by new visuals. It is pretty and dripping with nostalgia, but ultimately not engaging enough for long-term enjoyment.

64/100**Crazy Cars****Trackmania Nations**

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

OUTRUN 2006 COAST TO COAST



OUTRUN WAS AN INSTANT hit when it hit the arcades in the mid-80s. Anyone who has spent any time in these hallowed gaming halls knows *Splash Wave* and *Passing Breeze* intimately, and the series hasn't changed much over the years. In fact, like all the greatest arcade games, *Outrun* almost seemed to have removed itself from the timeline, becoming a class act in the league of *Pac-Man* and the *Mario Bros*, especially if you also happened to like cars as well as arcades.

However, with *Outrun 2006 Coast to Coast*, Sega is playing a dangerous game. This is the timeless classic modernised and released across all modern entertainment platforms.

Fire the game up, and you're presented with a few interesting choices of game modes. First off, there's single or multiplayer mode to select from, and deeper into the single-player menus, there are pretty much all the options you'd expect of a modern *Outrun* compilation, and even some that you don't necessarily.

Straight into *Outrun* mode for now though, and you can choose from a couple of *Outrun* styles that the dedicated arcade racer will know well. Pick one, choose a car, select your BGM, using the famous car-stereo interface, and you're away.

The graphics are impressive, with incredibly detailed reflective cars and tracks. The cars, of course, are all from one, famous Italian make. In fact, Ferrari doesn't actually officially license very many products, but this Sega classic remake is one of them, which is why a wide range of the tastiest sheet metal, carbon composite and carbon fibre ever produced by the evocative brand can be your steed in *Outrun 2006*. Everything from the Dino, your entry-level car, right up to the 21st century V12-engined F1-derived Enzo, and covering greats like the F40 and even SuperAmerica in the years in between, are beautifully recreated and rendered in stunning, shiny glory in this title.

Of course, you need to race to earn *Outrun* miles to 'buy' all these beauties, in whichever mode you prefer. The *Outrun* mode is precisely like the old arcades, with the player racing from checkpoint to checkpoint against a diminishing clock. There's also a Heart Attack mode where you'll need to obey the slightly barmy demands of your speed-crazed female companion to progress, and a Time Attack mode for challenging the course records.



Although incredibly simplistic, it's amazing how engaging the gameplay can be – at least at first. This could be pure nostalgia talking, but sliding the F40 at monstrous 70-degree slip angles around the streets of a fictional coastal town is good fun at first, as you strive for those extra miles to unlock higher-level cars.

It does, however, very quickly become one-dimensional, and frankly rather boring. But hang on one moment though. For the committed devotee, there is always *Outrun* multiplayer – an experience that every fan of this racer really ought to make sure he/she tries at some point. It's not going to keep us coming back for much more at the end of the day, but it's fun, considering how mind-numbing it really is underneath. Then again, anyone loading *Outrun* and expecting depth may as well be looking for life's answers in the LucasArts cult classic *Day of the Tentacle*. **NAG**





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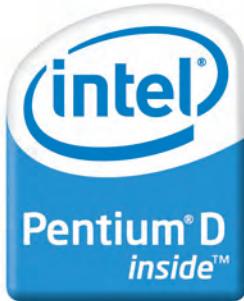
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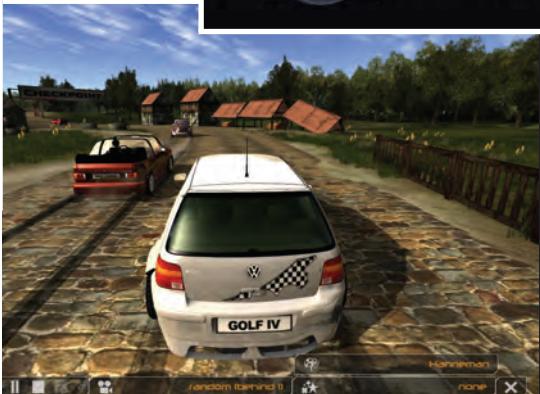


VITAL INFO

Platforms				
PC	PS2	PS3	PSP	
XBOX	360	DS	MOB	
Suggested Retail Price				
R265				
Developer				
Techland				
Publisher				
Prominence				
Supplier				
Megarom [011] 234-2680				
Genre				
Simulation				
Age Restriction				
3+				
Specifications				
CPU: Pentium 1.8GHz				
Video: 64MB graphics card				
RAM: 256MB RAM				
HDD: 2.5GB HDD				
CD/DVD: 16x DVD-ROM				
Players: 1 - 4				

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GTI RACING

GTI RACING IS a game focussed on and no doubt mostly funded by the VW group, powered by a promising but ultimately sub-par racing engine, and released by Techland (XR developer), and the even more obscure Providence as the publisher. Doesn't sound likely to be a sleeper hit, does it?

Despite some initial hiccups, *GTI Racing* feels like it has been painstakingly optimised precisely for keyboard control, and a real sense of quality, much like the German cars from Wolfsburg themselves, starts to shine through. The driving feel is superb, and you are able to 'feel' every nuance of weight distribution important to pitching the lightweight Golf 1 through the stunning, long and intricate courses snaking wildly, but controllably, through the often-narrow European and US back roads on which the action takes place.

Upgrading to a Golf II GTi 16V truly astounded us. The extra weight over the original Mk 1 'Rabbit', and how it is countered with a high-revving racy 1,800cc motor, came through brilliantly somehow, despite using the numb, dead keyboard as the only interface between player and game.

The tracks are superbly detailed, featuring dozens of lovely little secret shortcuts that you'll find throughout your career. You start with lots of fast, sweeping mountain roads and steadily progress into tighter village streets, as you progress through the single-player mode. Moreover, the undulating surfaces really complement the flying Vs perfectly.

If you are a fan of the GTi, all the really best examples of the finest German quality are here. It may not be as evocative a line-up as certain Stuttgart-based cousins who also used a game as a marketing platform some six years ago, but there are some thoroughly enjoyable real world cars to drive on lovely roads. What more can one ask of a driving sim? *GTI Racing* sucks you in with involvement; an impressive feat for what we expected would be a second-rate racer. **NAG**

**BOTTOM LINE**

What at first appears to be a marketing gimmick to coincide with the 30-year anniversary of the Golf GTi turns into a rewarding and enjoyable driving game!

84/100

TOCA Racedrive 3



Live For Speed



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R400

Developer

Rockstar San Diego

Publisher

Rockstar Games

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Sport

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Controllers: 1

Players: 1-2

**BOTTOM LINE**

Rockstar once again puts its critics in their place by showing what it's capable of with *Table Tennis*.

90/100**Top Spin 2 (360)**

BETTER THAN

Table Tennis (RL)

WORSE THAN

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS

IT'S TABLE TENNIS, RIGHT. No guns, no violence, just ping-pong in a pure, unadulterated form as visualised through the designed eyes of a professional championship table tennis player.

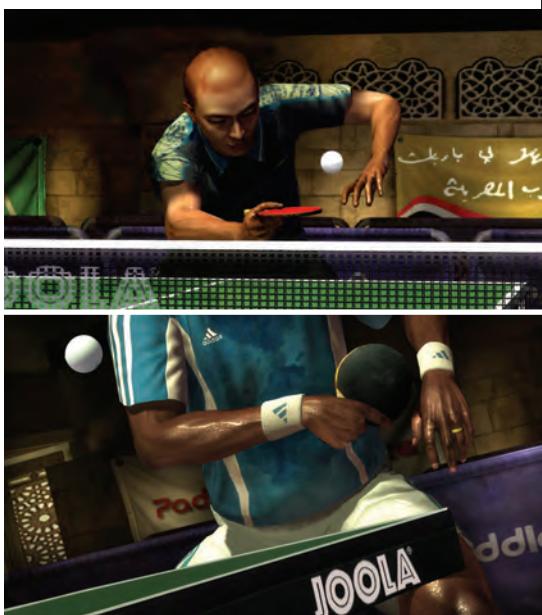
Table Tennis was originally considered a vanity project by Rockstar San Diego, but it quickly relegated that idea behind the more obvious truths. *Rockstar's Table Tennis* is both an example of Rockstar San Diego's talents, as well as a convenient technological test for its RAGE engine. The RAGE engine is what renders the people, animations and clothing in *Table Tennis* to rather great effect (you can slow down replays to watch the silky smooth character animation in action).

There is a core fundamental to *Table Tennis* how Rockstar sees it, but only after the basic controls are mastered. This process takes roughly half an hour, because *Table Tennis* isn't a reflex game (other than listening for the plonk on your opponent's paddle, indicating the ball is coming back to you), but your character (chosen from a list of true Characters, with a few unlockable ones along the way) will automatically hit the ball back.

This is, of course, dependent on where the ball is, where the character is and how long a character's arms are. But if all these things are close enough to hit the ball, tapping any button will volley the ball back automatically once it hits the paddle. Which button you tap will spin the ball a certain way. Spinning the ball is an intuitive way to either use the spin to your advantage, or to try and counter your opponent's offensive spin. A spun ball, with enough force, is almost impossible to hit back properly.

Each Character you can choose has their own strengths and weaknesses in Accuracy, Speed and such. These affect how easily the ball can be returned, spun or intercepted.

Holding down a spin button will charge a Focus Bar that lets you go 'Bullet Time' on your foe. This has the dual benefit of automatically making your character (when active) lunge to catch a missed ball, as well as giving you more time to aim your returning shot. The controller vibrates harder depending on how likely your shot (that you aim at that instant) will be off the table. You actually have a chance to 'pull back' if your controller goes AngryVibrate, letting you carefully aim shots to try and either steer your opponent for a later opening, or

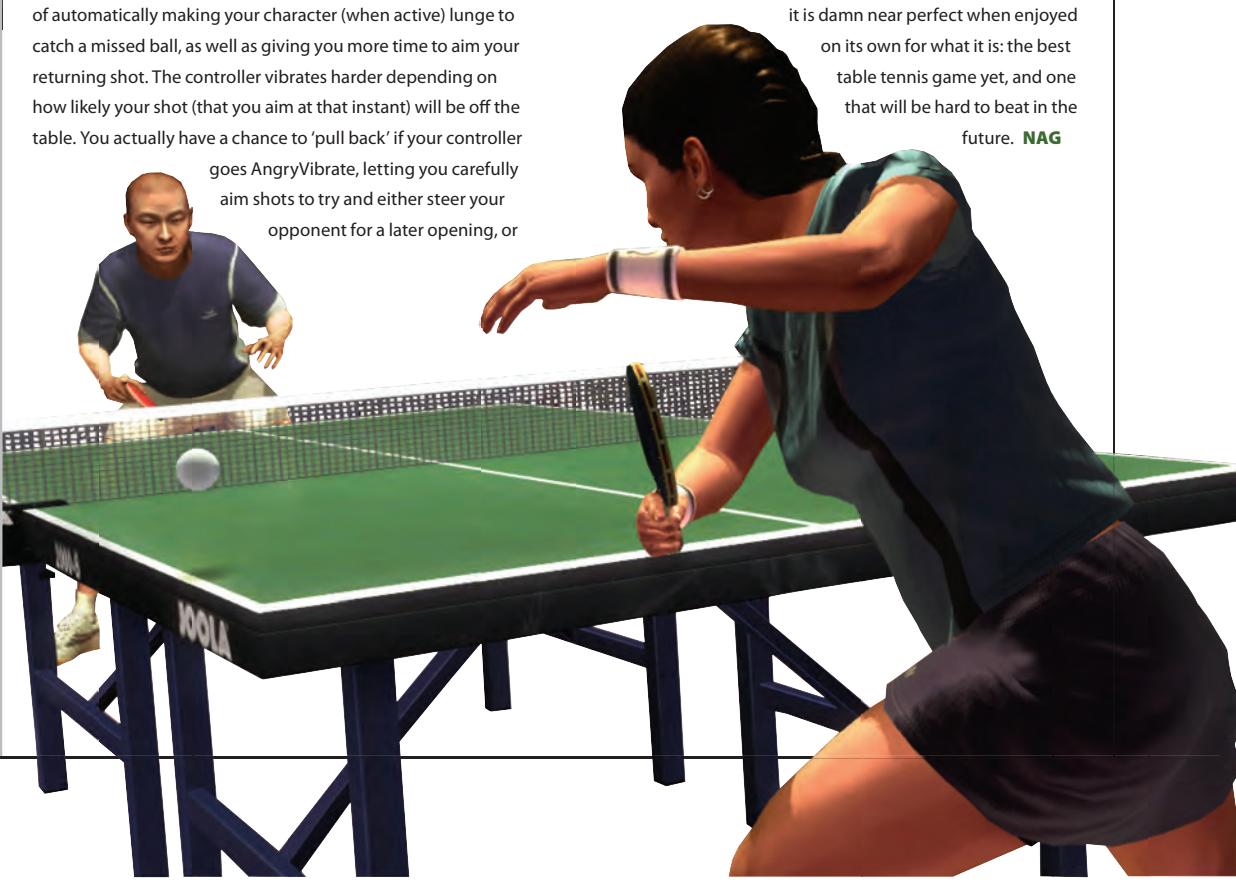


to just hammer through his or her defence.

Table Tennis is the type of game where initially you and a friend (or the CPU opponents in the Exhibition Match or Championship ladders) will only have a volley of 10 or so. A week of playing, and the volley counter may reach over the 300s, and if both opponents use the final (of a three stage) Focus Bar at the same time, the crowd dulls out, the surroundings disappear and all that remains is you, the ball, the table and your opponent in a black, timeless void.

To call *Table Tennis* Zen-like is just exposition. The reality is that *Table Tennis* is a budget-priced game (due to its lack of deeper content compared to GTA, according to Rockstar) that challenges the idea that table tennis could be done in any other way.

It is not a perfect game when compared to other games, but it is damn near perfect when enjoyed on its own for what it is: the best table tennis game yet, and one that will be hard to beat in the future. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	NGC

Suggested Retail Price

R279

Developer

Rockstar Games

Publisher

Take 2

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7900

Genre

Freeform

Age Restriction

18

Specifications

Players: 1

Online: No

Controllers: 1

BUY NOWAT
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Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	NGC

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Pandemic Studios

Publisher

THQ

Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

Genre

Tactical Action

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 2.8GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 1GB RAM

HDD: 2.56GB HDD

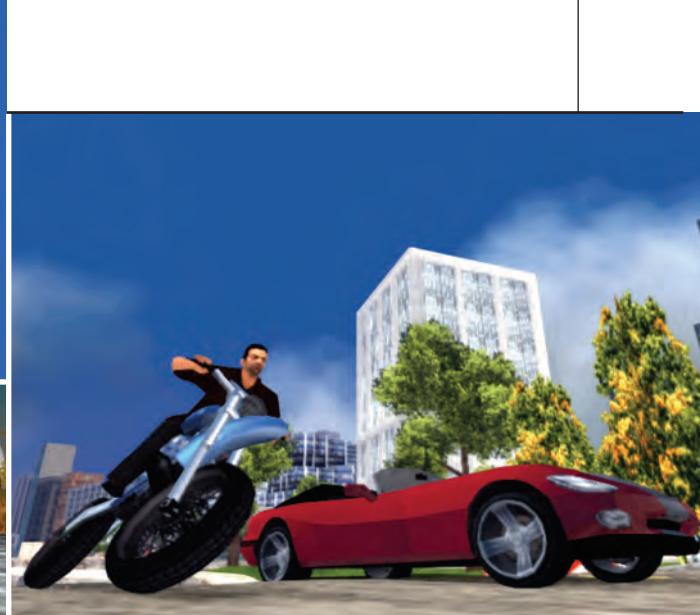
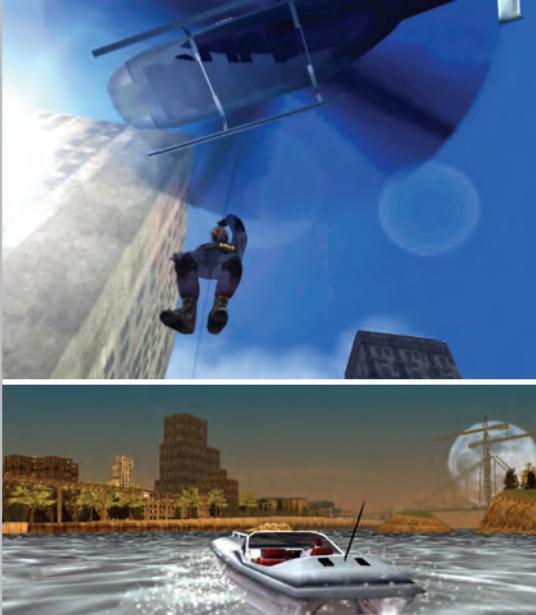
CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not Required

Players: 1

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More of an expansion pack, mostly for fans.

69/100

GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

HOW MUCH VALUE YOU get out of the pseudo-new *GTA* title depends on what you are looking for. Players yearning for more of the *San Andreas* experience will be disappointed. It's apt to remember that *Liberty City Stories* is not much more than a port of the PSP title, a game that was stripped down significantly to accommodate the handheld platform. As such, there are several things not present, such as the more robust combat system, the customisation and the sheer scale of the world. On top of that, this game takes place in Liberty City, which resembles its *GTA 3* counterpart very closely. There are some changes, but a lot of familiarity as well.

Fittingly, the game's storyline precedes *GTA 3*. A gangster fresh out of jail works his way up a mob family. In *GTA* tradition, not all is what it seems and blood soon flows. The game is still as uncompromising as previous *GTA* titles. The only problem here is that it came after *San Andreas*. There have been some welcome improvements, such as a much more legible map and a better lock-on system, but the limitations inherited from the PSP result in limiting controls, a small play area, and much less in terms of radio banter, not to mention pretty standard graphics for the series. It's all rather underwhelming. **NAG**

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS

THE ORIGINAL *FULL SPECTRUM Warrior* was touted as a US Army training tool, rebranded and slightly altered for gaming consumption. *Ten Hammers* avoids the hyperbole and cuts right to the pure hype, claiming to be "The Most Authentic and Realistic Combat Experience Ever."

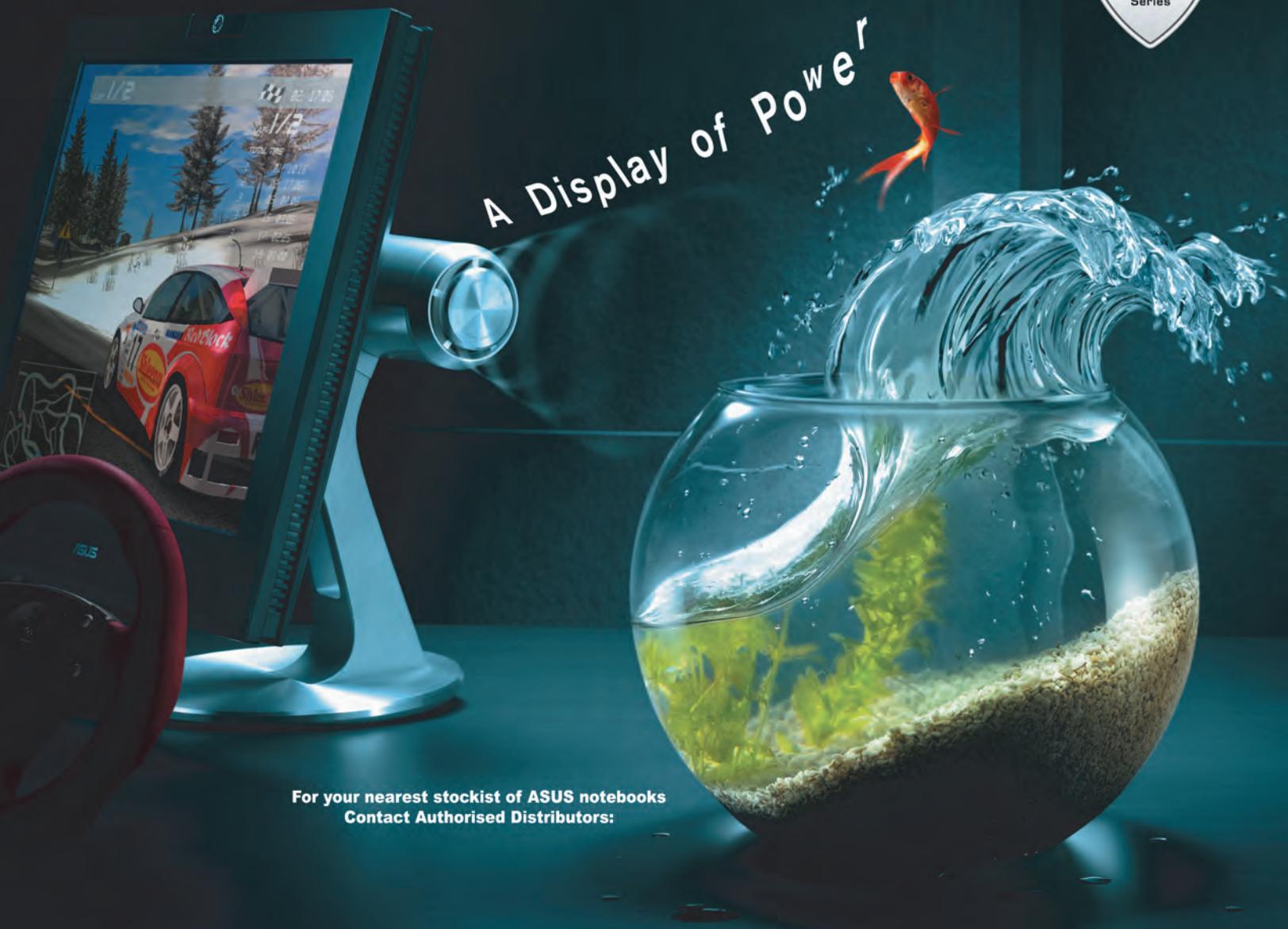
Regardless, the additions in *Ten Hammers* are noteworthy: tanks, verticality, precision fire, improved AI and more multiplayer modes. Once in the thick of it, however, there isn't much progression in terms of content other than progressing through the scenarios.

Calling in air strikes from helicopter-gunships and mortar stations helps level the playing field a little, though the core dynamic of *Ten Hammers* is as solid as the original - a tough strategic experience that is rather unforgiving.

The biggest difference between the original and *Ten Hammers* seems to be more in execution. The first game had a certain flair that was much larger than the sum of its parts. This time around, you're treated to crass acting, crass visuals and odd changes to how things work that just don't mesh right. The additions add flavour, but the underlying taste of the game just comes off as bitter.

Fans of the first game will no doubt enjoy this 'expansion pack', since that is what this is, rather unabashedly. The additions to the game dynamics and inclusion of new elements breathe life into the rather restrictive system of the first game, though while you can enter buildings now, the ability to do this is rare and restricted to specific buildings. The enemy may be smarter, though this feels more like an accuracy tweak and not an actual planning tweak. **NAG**





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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	NGC

Suggested Retail Price

R399

Developer

Zootify

Publisher

Jowood

Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Players: 1

Online: No

Controllers: 1

BUY NOWAT
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Despite sometimes-stellar visual effects, *Panzer Elite Action* is an ultimately disappointing tank combat simulator, owing to clumsy controls and a very uninspiring and bleary game dynamic.

53/100**VITAL INFO****Platforms**

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	NGC

Suggested Retail Price

R399

Developer

Travellers Tales

Publisher

SEGA

Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

Genre

Puzzle/Platform

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 1-2

Online: No

Controllers: 1-4 (Multitap)

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MP3 • ACCESSORIES**BOTTOM LINE**

As a platform title it proves quite bland and uninspiring, but it does offer its renowned kind of entertainment in its puzzle and mini-game modes.

66/100

PANZER ELITE ACTION

ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF games might allow you a fleeting chance here and there to pilot one of these giant metal juggernauts, it's always just a side attraction and never the main feature, which is perhaps surprising given the success of such games in the past. *Panzer Elite Action* aims to revive the waning tank-warfare sub-genre, and although it looks the part, the play dynamic sadly doesn't quite manage to live up to expectations. Despite being set across 18 missions, and offering a variety of different tanks, *Panzer Elite Action* offers a very restrictive experience from start to finish. Initially, it can prove quite entertaining to witness the degree of destruction your vehicle is capable of inflicting, but given the prerequisite immobility of such a large machine, the experience soon lapses into the tedium of driving from checkpoint to checkpoint, and

routinely dispatching enemies as you go along, without any element of excitement or anticipation ever creeping in. Each of the various tanks feels almost exactly like any other. They all use the same ammunition, and 'health power-ups' are simply too abundant to ever allow the game to become challenging. The stiffest opposition, in fact, comes in the form of your own gun barrel, which, bizarrely, rotates slower than your aiming reticle, in a failed attempt to recreate the slowness of your vehicle. Furthermore, the over-abundance of nondescript enemies removes almost any sense of satisfaction from progressing through the missions. Overall, despite the expansive and often gorgeous environments, *Panzer Elite Action* simply lacks an involving enough play dynamic to be considered 'elite'. It's not terrible, just terribly mediocre. **NAG**

SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

THE MONKEY BALL FRANCHISE has long been renowned for providing some of the most simplistically addictive and entertaining puzzle game experiences available. *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* doesn't stray too far from the tried and tested formula, but tries to expand the whole concept into a platform title. Of course, the typical puzzles and mini-games, for which the series is known, make a return, and these are undoubtedly the strongest elements of the title. Less impressive, however, is the adventure mode, which sees you trying to negotiate through a number of platform-style levels, under the premise of trying to stop a group of evildoers known as the 'Naysayers' from sucking all the 'joy' out of the Monkey Kingdom. Throughout the game, you'll also gain access to a number of abilities that can be used by stringing together different combinations of mono-syllabic monkey chants, allowing your character to fly, bounce, fight and perform several other rudimentary platform game actions. All in all, however, the platform component of the title does little to make this game distinguishable from the myriad of other platform titles around. The biggest innovation is, perhaps, that in an effort to abolish loading screens, at certain points in the game you'll have to roll around in a wheel-like device for seemingly indefinite periods in order to open a gate that allows you to advance. It's a cheap and not very endearing trick. Visually, the title is fairly impressive, with well-detailed characters, and lively, colourful environments.

Where this game does succeed is with the puzzle levels and fantastic mini-games that defined the entire series. If you're looking for a strict platformer, look elsewhere, but if you're in

the market for some simple but entertaining puzzle gaming, this may just be worth a look. **NAG**



VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R321

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Supplier

Nintendo (011) 256-7760

Genre

Puzzle

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Wireless: Yes

DS Download: Yes

Players: 1 – 10

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You just cannot beat a ten-player *Tetris* that can be played off one cartridge, except if you add online Internet play, which is what Nintendo did.

75/100

TETRIS DS

WHILE THE WEST MAY lead you to believe nothing good ever came out of the Soviet Union, Alexey Pashitnov would disagree. Back in 1985, he invented a puzzle game while working for the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. This game derived its name from the Greek numerical prefix 'tetra' meaning four. In *Tetris*, all of the blocks consist of four segments, a rather crucial element that makes *Tetris* what it is.

The main selling point of *Tetris DS* remains the fact that ten players can play locally over the wireless of the DS, using only a single cartridge. Up to four players can duke it out online, using Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection.

Tetris is *Tetris*. Not much can be added or changed without breaking the core formula. So instead, Nintendo opted to create a few different modes of play, each with a unique Nintendo theme.

Standard Mode is the traditional, the only variation being that the player can 'hold' a block by pressing L or R. The 'infinite rotation' rule from *Tetris Worlds* returns, letting you rotate a block forever without dropping.

The Mission Mode sets goals for the player, such as removing a certain amount of lines with a certain block, while Push mode is a VS mode that involves two players playing on



a 'mirrored' vertical playfield. Touch Mode lets players 'slide' static blocks with the stylus to create rows while lowering a pre-built tower of *Tetris*. Catch Mode is the most unique. The player controls a central block that can be moved around while *Tetris* blocks fall from the top. Puzzle Mode involves solving a pre-built situation of *Tetris*, using a limited set of blocks and moves.

Thanks to the single-cart multiplayer and online play, *Tetris DS* is a good bet for anyone who enjoys puzzle games or just loves *Tetris*. NAG

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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R382

Developer

Synetic

Publisher

Playlogic

Supplier

Devon [041] 365-0258

Genre

Racing

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 1-2

Online: No

Controllers: 1-2

BUY NOWAT
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An interesting mix of arcade- and simulation-racing that is ultimately just too indecisive to make for a very engrossing or enjoyable gaming experience. Taking into account the poor graphics as well, it seems that *World Racing 2* doesn't offer very much to merit a look at in a genre filled with high-quality titles.

59/100**Mercedes Benz World Racing**

BETTER THAN

Gran Turismo 4

WORSE THAN

Contrary to the title, this has nothing to do with a race around the world



WORLD RACING 2

WORLD RACING 2, THE sequel to the largely unnoticed *Mercedes-Benz World Racing*, once again attempts to find the perfect blend of arcade- and simulation-style racing and, this time around, boasts a much-expanded roster of vehicles, totalling 90 cars from various real-life manufacturers including Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, Alfa Romeo, Morgan, Pagani and Lotus.

The game is divided into Career and Free Ride modes, with the Career mode offering a number of challenges, starting with aptitude tests and license examinations, as well as time trials and standard races. *World Racing 2*, however, tries to set itself apart from its competitors by rewarding you with 'Speedbucks' after every event. These can be used to unlock new vehicles, tracks and modifications for your cars. Speedbucks are awarded for winning races and completing time trials successfully. However, the rating system also takes into account your driving style. Cutting corners or knocking into your opponents to slow them down will cost you Speedbucks, whereas successfully drifting through corners and completing events, without damaging your car, will net you bonus points.

Speaking of damage, the damage model is perhaps one of the most pleasing elements of the game. If you scrape against safety railings, you'll have a scratched paint job. Collide head-on with a large stationary object and you're likely to lose at least a bumper. Overall, the penalty mechanism works quite well. The game offers you the freedom to drive as you like, but provides the right incentives to make you try to race properly. Further spicing things up is the variable traffic on the courses. Some races take place on fully populated freeways, while at other times you'll have the entire course to yourself.

Of course, this is one of the more simulation-oriented aspects of the game, firmly defining this title as not being an out-and-out arcade-style racer. Unfortunately, the play dynamic is somewhat less unequivocal. It's a difficult sensation to accurately describe, but the cars handle in a manner that is not typical of either style. On the one hand, the vehicles tend to, at times, feel rather weighty, with a tendency towards under-steering. Tap the brakes, however, and the car stops almost as suddenly as if it had collided with a brick wall. It certainly takes some getting used to, but even once one has come to grips with the neither-here-nor-there handling, the game still feels quite disjointed.

In terms of vehicle customisation, the game is more geared



towards tuning cars for aesthetics rather than performance. If you're hoping for *Gran Turismo* style control over the inner workings of your vehicle, you'll be disappointed. It does, however, offer a variety of vinyls, rims, body-kits and other amenities to allow you to turn any vehicle into a migraine-inducing disco-ball on wheels.

Another disappointment is the visuals. Although the PC version of the game has been touted for its magnificent graphics, much seems to have been lost in translation to the PS2. The vehicle models look blocky and bland, and not nearly as sharp as those seen in other recent racing titles. In terms of audio, *World Racing 2* provides realistic-enough sound effects, and a rather generic, if appropriate, soundtrack. It's not remarkable, but it's certainly adequate. Less adequate, however, is a rather clumsy and counter-intuitive menu system, which, more often than not, ends up being confusing and frustrating rather than functional.

The aim with *World Racing 2* is to create a hybrid of arcade- and simulation-style racing, and in doing so, it manages to incorporate a number of successful elements from both styles. Unfortunately, however, the overall result doesn't gel particularly well, and the dichotomy tends to become terribly apparent throughout the game. The range of available vehicles is impressive, as is the innovative 'Speedbucks' rating system. However, the vehicle handling just isn't realistic enough to please simulation fans, nor frenetic enough for arcade junkies. In addition to the flawed game dynamic, the outdated graphics do little to redeem this title, and an overly annoying user interface simply makes matters worse. It's certainly not a terrible game, and some might like its unique style of play, but for the most part, *World Racing 2* is just too divided between styles to stand out in its genre. **NAG**

Turn Your LCD Monitor into a Video Conference Center

ASUS PW201 - 20-Inch Widescreen with Built-in Mega-Pixel Webcam

It's not very often that you see everything you ever needed from a display packed into one LCD monitor. The ASUS PW201 20" widescreen is one of the most complete display solutions we have seen in a very long time. It comes with a built in 1.3M-pixel webcam to deliver high-resolution video conferencing right out of the box. And its innovative pivot neck design enables both vertical and horizontal viewing angles for optimized viewing comfort during different visual applications.



◀ Pivot feature provides portrait or landscape viewing option

1.3M-pixel webcam - Video conference capability built in

With the 1.3M-pixel webcam built in and the exclusive LifeFrame software bundle, the PW201 is not just a display, but a right-out-of-the-box video conferencing solution as well.

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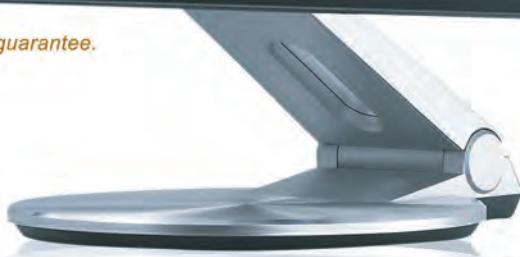
The PW201 offers both vertical and horizontal viewing angles through the innovative pivot neck design. Whether it's surfing the Internet, using spreadsheets, viewing different photos or editing 3D graphics, it provides the most comfortable viewing position for any situations.

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▲ Widescreen with ZBD guarantee.



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The PW201 also provides rich and versatile audio and video input options. With 3 USB ports, D-sub, DVI-D S-video, composite, component (YPbPr), and 2 built-in 3W stereo speakers, it is able to connect with various devices, such as game consoles, digital cameras, camcorders, DVD players and STBs, and provides awesome visual and sound quality. Besides, need to research on Internet, but a championship game is going to start on TV? The PW201 offers Picture-in-Picture function and helps you to watch images of two different signals at the same time.



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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

The Collective

Publisher

Take 2 Interactive

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

Genre

Adventure

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.8GHz

Video: 64MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 3.0GB HDD

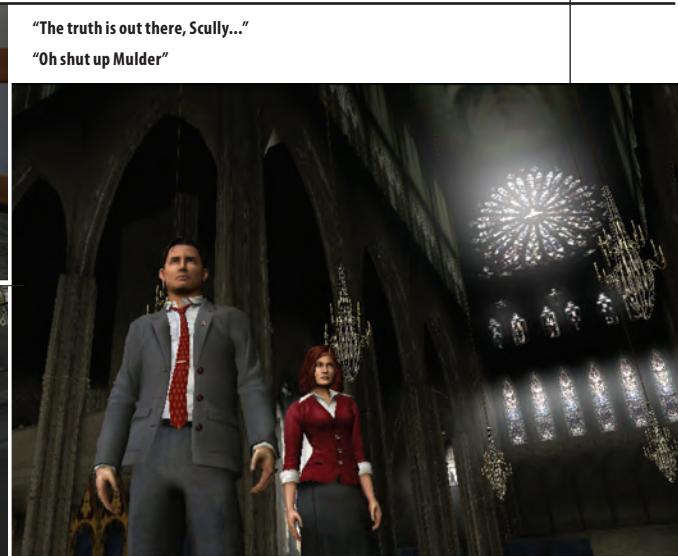
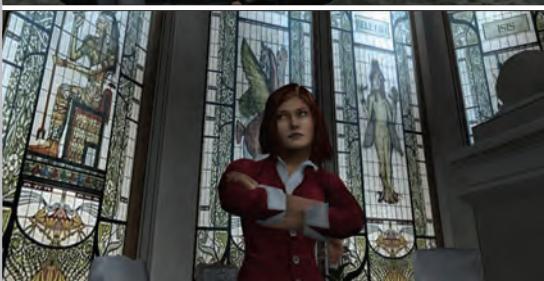
CD/DVD: 6x CD/DVD-ROM

Players: 1

Internet: Not Required

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Our good friend Roget suggests abominable, appalling, atrocious, awful, contemptible, detestable, dreadful, ghastly, heinous, horrendous, loathsome, nauseating, odious, reprehensible, rotten, and vile. One might magnanimously throw in tedious, dated, bland, unimaginative, frustrating, and buggy. This game will steal precious hours from your life that could be spent better frolicking in a vat of poisoned nails.

15/100**Um... Spice World?****E.T.****IT'S ANOTHER**

THE DA VINCI CODE

ACCORDING TO SALES STATISTICS, more than 10 million people harbour a filthy little secret: they've read the *Da Vinci Code*. And, vehement protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, they probably enjoyed it. Despite his thuggishly wielding a hackneyed vocabulary that rarely strays beyond the realm of the budget paperback idiom, Dan Brown weaves a goodish yarn, and one which might conceivably translate rather well into an adventure game.

Game developer The Collective certainly managed to capture much of the novel's electrifying suspense. Indeed, with their cold, dead eyes, suspiciously rigid movement, impassive faces, and enormous 'killer's hands', everyone is a suspect, including your avatars. The dashing and enchantingly condescending Robert "Listen and I will tell" Langdon and the charmingly ineffectual Sophie "Mon Dieu, it's a <insert currently-examined object>" Neve, thwart one another's progress at every turn, with their (deliberately?) clumsy flailing about and path hogging. Coupled with a fiendishly intriguing series of silent cinematics (cunningly leaving the player to decide for themselves what crucial dialogue is taking place), a deviously drifting camera, and an ingeniously counter-intuitive and unresponsive control system, this game is a treat.

And for 'treat', of course, kindly read 'twelve-course poop buffet'.

In a touching note on the inside of the manual cover, the developers promise "...for the puzzle lover in all of us, an abundance of unique encryptions, anagrams and mind twisters." Oh indeed? Every encryption encountered during the course of the game uses the same cipher. You'll encounter one anagram. And mind twisters? The first of these diabolical brain benders, setting the tone for the remainder of the game, involves turning over a business card to find a phone number. The only things twisting are players' lips – into sneers. This game truly puts the 'dumb' back into 'dumbfound'.

The combat system is a complete shambles. Opting for a "...new cinematic style of combat unlike any you've seen before", the Collective served up a Lovecraftian horror the likes of which one might frankly care never to see again, either. Essentially, it involves entering into a struggle mode, then tapping a given series of mouse actions, and hoping against all hope that the

"The truth is out there, Scully..."

"Oh shut up Mulder"

both-buttons-simultaneously directive is actually going to register this time. And this all against an enraged player-side soundtrack of "Sophie, get out of my way, you damnable meddlesome tart!"

This game bears all the hallmarks of a rushed development cycle of which a generous portion, it seems, was spent finely tuning Sophie's heaving bosom. The graphics and animation are dated, the interface is cumbersome, the mouse control during interactive sequences might be described as 'soupy', and you can't remap your keys.

The plot sequencing is disjointed and fails entirely to deliver the exhilarating whirligig of about-turns that made the novel so much trashy fun. The puzzles are scurrilously simplistic and yawn inducing repetitive. Perhaps we've been irrevocably spoilt by such conceptual masterpieces as (oh, who can say?) *Frogger*, but one expects a little more bang for their buck than squandering three carpal-endangering hours bashing the 'E' key so Robert may successfully assist the hapless Sophie in such ambitious tasks as climbing out of a window/slithering through an air duct/examining a painting.

The only reason this game is awarded any points is because, in the face of such overwhelming odds, there are no spelling mistakes. **NAG**





Give Potion
Press

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R399

Developer

Sony Online Entertainment, Inc.

Publisher

Sony Online Entertainment, Inc.

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

Genre

RPG

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Memory: 384KB

Wireless: Yes

Online: Yes

Game Sharing: No

Players: 1-4

Internet: Not Required

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BOTTOM LINE

Vanilla action RPG, dipped lovingly in syrupy-sweet hack and slash. It's sticking to a mostly tried and tested formula, but that's not necessarily such a bad thing. Pretty colours and flagitious slaughter. A Saturday afternoon well spent.

69/100



UNTOLD LEGENDS: THE WARRIOR'S CODE

WOE, IT HAS BEEN eighteen years since an insidious tyrant seized the throne of the once-harmonious city of Koryn Thal. His grotesque minions have, at his cruel impulse, indubitably slaughtered the bunnies in the fields and trampled the dandelions. The kingdom is in a bad way, and just when its hapless denizens thought things couldn't get any worse, members of an ancient bloodline of shape shifters, known as Changelings, are now being systematically yanked off the streets towards an unknown fate (although reasonable speculation would suggest that it includes death in some form or another). Those Changelings who've managed to evade capture thus far are now scrambling to safety beyond the city's walls.

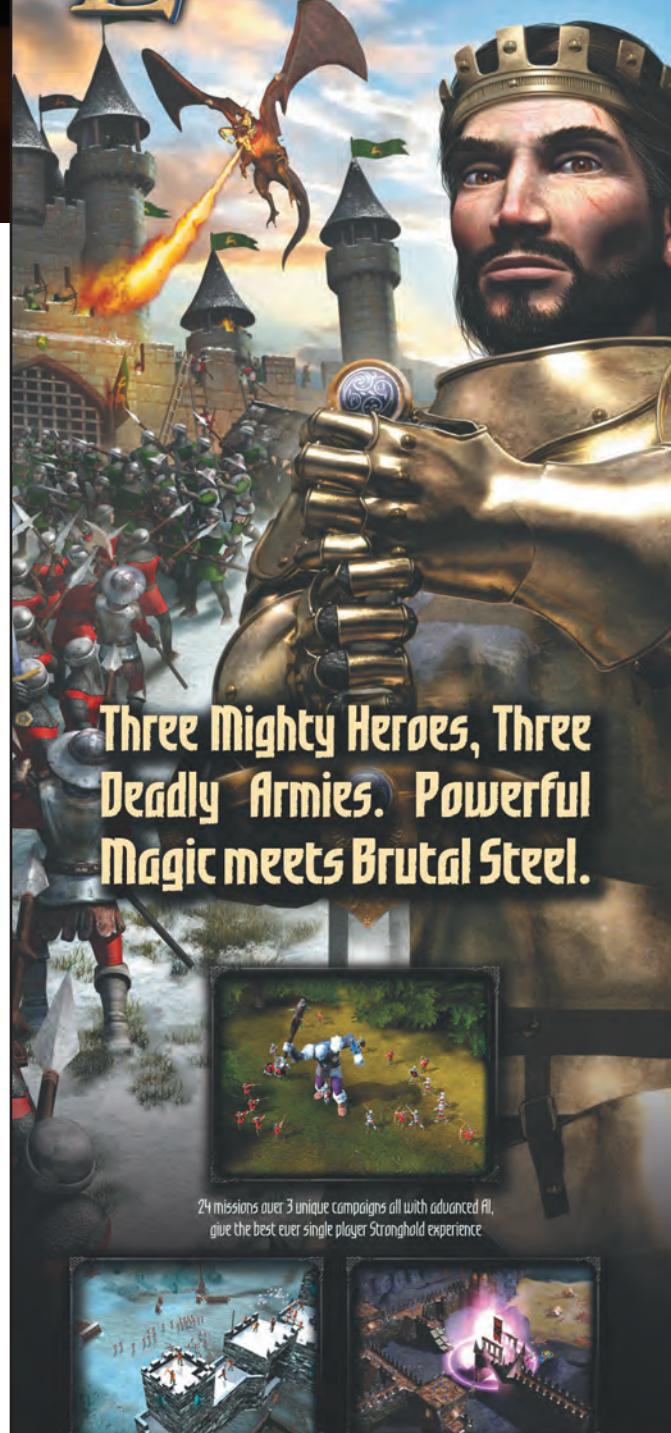
And the inevitable kicker—cue the fanfare—is, of course, that while slithering inconspicuously from shady tree trunk to shady tree trunk, the Changelings just 'happen to stumble' across a 'closely guarded secret' that has 'redemption' stamped all over it. Who cares about the story anyway? Let's maim stuff and get stuff to maim more stuff better.

There are five character classes to choose from: Guardian, Mercenary, Disciple, Prowler and Scout. But don't let those esoteric names bewilder you—they're just Fighters, Rogues and Mages, with the standard array of skills, attack styles and special abilities you'd expect. Each class has a different Changeling form, which suggests some rather rigid adherence to tradition. The Changeling form itself only really comes into play, as it were, out on the battlefield. After cleaving Mr Monster verily in twain, you absorb his euphemistically-named 'essence' (when what you're really doing is devouring souls, you saucy minx). Slurp enough 'soul-slushies', and you get to transform into an upwardly mobile set of jaws and claws for a short space of gore-time.

The graphics are snappy, with some dashing particle effects, fairly detailed models, smooth animation, and even a few cinematic cut-scenes. And the sound isn't too bad either. The game mechanics are relatively intuitive and straightforward, although it does become a bit of a task remembering what key combinations you've assigned to your skills once you've racked up a few. The cutting-a-swath-of-chunky-destruction-to-get-from-A-to-B gameplay itself is a tad repetitive, although this is occasionally relieved by cutting-a-swath-of-chunky-destruction-to-get-from-A-to-B-against-the-clock-type scenarios.

No, it doesn't pulverise paradigms, nor does it rattle or even tickle them. But then, it's not masquerading as anything other than an action RPG. And it's really quite fun. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO**Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

In-Fusio

Publisher

In-Fusio

Supplier

www.thumbrtribe.co.za

Genre

Platform

Download Code

SMS: tribe 703136 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word tribe.

Check www.thumbrtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

ASTERIX AND THE VIKINGS

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE GAUL IS back, whether that might be Asterix or his invincible sidekick Obelix. The pair, famous for taking on the legions of Rome, has a new challenge when the Vikings land and kidnap Jusforkix. Based on the recent movie, the duo set off to rescue the chieftain's nephew. The world of Asterix is a colourful one, something the game reflects quite beautifully. The animations are smooth and the controls responsive. But the game mechanics are quite simple. The characters collect potions, helmets and other objects through obstacle-laden levels with a limited amount of lives. More lives are gained through game bonuses as you play through the dozen or so levels.

The feel of the game is very similar to the books', and fans will definitely get a kick out of it. Since Asterix and



Asterix and the Vikings uses a familiar game style made popular by a certain plumber, the style will definitely appeal to a lot of players. It might be a bit easy and not a major challenge for most, but it's a fun way to spend an afternoon. **NAG**

A typical platform game in the South of Gaul **70/100**

**VITAL INFO****Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

Big Blue Bubble

Publisher

Iplay

Supplier

www.thumbrtribe.co.za

Genre

Strategy

Download Code

SMS: tribe 10352 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word tribe.

Check www.thumbrtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

GOODFELLAS

IN THIS GANGSTER STRATEGY game, you get to rub shoulders with the shady characters from *GoodFellas*, the iconic Martin Scorsese movie about urban gangsters. Somehow, this found itself in a game format and an interesting one at that. The point is to be the top boss by 1990. Actions are taken in turns and a turn equates a week. There are various activities to take part in which will earn cash, which in turn means respect. Harass businesses for protection money, gamble on horses or boxing, and make good money selling goods from your crimes. But the real respect booster is playing poker. This part of the game is pretty solid as a poker game, plus you get to play cards with cigar-chewing gangsters as a theme.

GoodFellas feels a bit short-lived and lacks depth, plus it doesn't take more than a few sessions to beat.



The poker game is good, but most of the other gambling elements are really up to the game's hidden, but basic devices. **NAG**

Good poker, but the game itself is short-lived **75/100**

**VITAL INFO****Platforms**

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

Glu Mobile

Publisher

Atari

Supplier

www.thumbrtribe.co.za

Genre

Action

Download Code

SMS: tribe 703216 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word tribe.

Check www.thumbrtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

DRIVER VEGAS

THE DRIVER FRANCHISE HAS not been a happy one. The first game was a masterpiece in the genre of clutching a virtual wheel. But the series never managed to recapture that spark, and the latest game fared rather poorly. All, that is, except the mobile game. After moving over a million units globally, Glu got the nod from publisher Atari to create a mobile-exclusive version. Set in Vegas, the new game picks up where *Parallel Lines* left off, as Tanner finds himself in a bit of trouble. The action is split between driving missions and on-foot action, though the majority of the game takes place behind a wheel. Here the car can only take a certain amount of damage, and Tanner can only spend a small amount of time outside the vehicle. But he can take other cars to get back on track. Sometimes the game switches to on-foot action where there is plenty

of gunplay. Unfortunately, not a lot has changed between the games either, and anyone who played the original will be struck by a sense of familiarity. Navigation can also be tricky, but above all, the story doesn't matter that much, though the graphics help paint a varied picture. *Driver Vegas* doesn't have a lot of depth and more gunplay sections would have split things up better. Overall, though, it's fun to play. **NAG**

Not much in depth, but it can grow on you **77/100**





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Menlyn Center - 012 368-1478
pcgw@pcgameworld.co.za

BALDUR'S GATE 4-IN-1 BOX SET

Developer: Black Isle
Publisher: Atari
Distributor: MegaRom [011] 234-2680
Genre: RPG
Platform: PC
RRP: R199

THESE ARE DEFINING moments in the world of the digital RPG and that was *Baldur's Gate*. Black Isle and Bioware's concepts in the series created a new following for RPGs and a rebirth of the genre. You also have to acknowledge *Fallout*'s creation of the system, but *Baldur's Gate* took it to the masses. It also made news shipping on several CDs, and its allowance for multiple installs (and adept CD swapping between players) meant that one game could support four players in great multiplayer campaigns.

The box set is a no-brainer for fans who want to secure their own copies or anyone who wants to revisit one of the best CRPG series yet created. Both the games and their expansions are included, making it a definite *Baldur's Gate* package. Despite their age, both games are still visually appealing, and the stories and quests should be enticing enough. The saddest part of this compilation is that playing them makes you realise the CRPG genre hasn't really evolved much at all since then. **NAG**



DEVIL MAY CRY 3 SPECIAL EDITION

Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Distributor: MegaRom [011] 234-2680
Genre: Action
Platform: PC
RRP: R199

YOU CAN NOW PLAY as brother Vergil and explore your evil side. A new Turbo Mode ups the game speed by 120%, a new Very Hard Mode makes you its bitch, and the Jester returns as a Boss enemy. Aside from these additions, *Devil May Cry 3 Special Edition* for PC is *Devil May Cry 3*. Sadly, in the conversion process, Capcom somehow managed to take a working, pristine game and turn it into an ugly rendition that fails to live up to the original.

However, if you can squint past the horrible MPEG-compressed video clips that replaced the crisp in-engine visuals from the original, and if you can find a decent-enough gamepad (since trying to play *Devil May Cry 3* on the keyboard is just an exercise in sadomasochism), then you'll be in for a treat. The core mechanics of *Devil May Cry 3* thankfully remain intact, and the styles, the moves and all the other elements that set *Devil May Cry 3* apart from your usual brawler, have all made the transition unaltered.

Therefore, while a port, *Devil May Cry 3 Special Edition* may not be the best way to experience the *Devil May Cry* legacy, it is still a good way for non-console gamers to get a taste of what they've been missing. It is hard to resist a game where a major weapon you can eventually wield is an electric guitar that shoots out bats, as Dante plays a mean riff on it. Absurd, yes, but then again, you're talking about a game where one character physically rocket-jumps, and makes it seem plausible. **NAG**



BUDGET TOP 20



PLATINUM - GTA: SAN ANDREAS

Developer: Rockstar

Publisher: Take Two

Distributor: Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

Genre: Freeform

Platform: PS2

RRP: R199

ARGUABLY THE BEST *Grand Theft Auto* game developed has finally reached the Platinum line, and comes at a price that the game will return tenfold. Arriving back in your old neighbourhood, you are soon involved in expanding the local gang with your brother. But you also want to find your mother's killer, not to mention the usually corrupt cops and gangsters breathing down your neck. *San Andreas* set a new standard for the series in size, activities and sheer versatility. Any sandbox game before it, including the *GTA* top sellers, feels out of touch after playing this. TJ's ability to swim and fight, a whole range of new vehicles, plus the ability to customise how your character looks and acts gives a lot more depth in a game where, ironically, it's less about killing and more about doing back flips on a super bike between skyscrapers. **NAG**



1. *Myst V: End of Ages*



2. *Rayman 10th Anniversary*



3. *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*



4. *Far Cry*



5. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*



6. *Age of Empires Gold Edition*



7. *Zoo Tycoon*



8. *CSI: Dark Motives*



9. *Brothers in Arms*



10. *Playboy The Mansion Gold Edition*



11. *The Settlers: Heritage of Kings*



12. *Lock On: Air Combat Simulator*



13. *Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield Gold Edition*



14. *Chessmaster 10th Edition*



15. *Silent Hunter III*



16. *CSI: Miami*



17. *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*



18. *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*



19. *Heroes of Might and Magic IV Complete*



20. *Combat Flight Simulator 2*

R99 each

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January 2006



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SA Computer MAGAZINE

AUGUST 2006 ISSUE

Bill Gates Stepping Down in 2008
Microsoft's CEO has announced he will step down from his position in 2008, handing over the reigns to Steve Ballmer.

HP Pavilion dv9000 Entertainment Notebook PC
The new Pavilion dv9000 is a sleek, portable notebook designed for entertainment. It features a 19.1-inch wide screen, a DVD burner, and a built-in media center.

GROUP TEST: Power Line Networking
We test five power line networking products to see which ones offer the best performance and reliability.

How We Tested
We used a variety of methods to test the power line networking products, including network traffic analysis and real-world usage scenarios.

News: The HP dv9000 entertainment notebook

POWER LINE NETWORKING
Power line networking allows you to extend your home network over existing electrical wiring. We tested five products to find the best ones.

BROADBAND OVER POWER LINES
This technology allows you to connect to the Internet via your power lines. We tested five products to find the best ones.

Power over Ethernet
This technology allows you to power network devices like switches and routers over the same cables that carry data. We tested five products to find the best ones.

HOW WE TESTED
We used a variety of methods to test the power line networking products, including network traffic analysis and real-world usage scenarios.

Group Test: Power line networking

Editing Wikipedia
Part 1: The House Rules
Details of all the community-relevant rules that govern the editing of Wikipedia. This guide will help you understand the basic rules of the site, such as how to add and edit content, and how to handle disputes.

How To Edit Wikipedia
A step-by-step guide to editing Wikipedia, from creating a new account to publishing your first article. It includes tips on how to write clear, concise, and informative articles.

Next Month
What to expect in the next issue of SA Computer Magazine, including reviews of the latest software and hardware products.

Hands-On How-To: Editing Wikipedia

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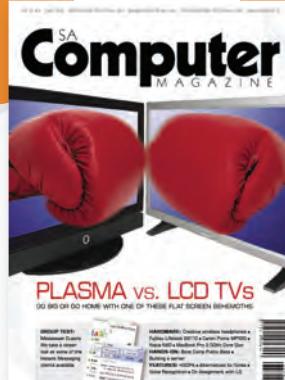
Music Enhancing Software
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Feature: Music enhancing software

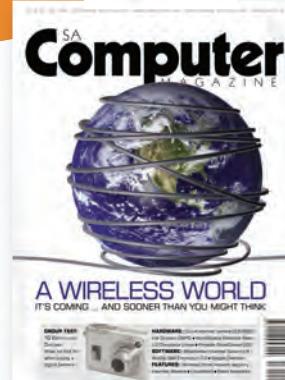
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HARDWARE

HARDWARE INDEX

TECHNOLOGY FEATURE

102 How to play online games

Getting online to have a quick frag-filled deathmatch with some friends is not, particularly in our environment, a plug-and-play affair like it can be in more mature markets. This month, NAG Ed James Francis tackles the issue of online gaming, SA-style, and reveals what you need to know about successfully taking your gaming self to the information super highway.

REVIEWS

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H@RDCore3 ROUNDUP

110 Purity, Precision and Power

For this month's roundup, we've gathered together a collection of the coolest gaming input devices we've come across, to provide you, the NAG reader, with our findings of the essential input device hardware you need to complete your ultimate gaming rig. This month's H@rdcor3 roundup covers gaming-focussed keyboards and mice, as well as the classic flight-sim joysticks available in the SA arena.



AMD AND ATI TO CREATE PROCESSING POWERHOUSE

THE NEWS OF AMD buying out ATI has just hit our desks, and we must say we are stunned. There is, without any doubt, one hell of a breakup coming to our sector as we speak.

So, it's official this time. AMD has bought out graphics giant ATI for a total sum of \$5.4bn. When the news first surfaced, the journalist who had penned it was jeered and jibed by the industry at large, and certain key individuals from companies in the know, like Gigabyte and Corsair for example, whispered in hushed tones that although publicly denied, the sentiment could well be true.

We have to confess, we were also non-believers. It just seemed to make no sense at all. No sound motives for ATI to sell, no sensible reason for AMD to buy, but sure enough, it has happened, and we think for the most part, the industry, like us, is somewhat stunned.

Such shock was inevitable. When the big boys of our industry start trading blows, the repercussions are always going to be widespread and running deep. And, in this case, it's literally going to be a chaos-wreaking explosion of knock-on effects and scrambling for position. The combination of two technology giants is likely to change the landscape of our sector of the IT industry, in particular, into a form unrecognisable from what it is today.

At the international press conference, held on the same day as the final acquisition announcement was posted, both ATI CEO Dave Orton and AMD CEO Hector Ruiz repeatedly spoke about "... combating the monopoly by the formation of this processing powerhouse!" They also maintained that this major merger would not result in ATI technology no longer being available to the chip giant, which relies on ATI in the enthusiast segment almost as much as AMD has relied on NVIDIA in the past. In fact, AMD was touting a new era of open standards and cooperation with the industry at large, with the focus of the move being to grow both companies as well as the greater global IT industry.

"Through the wide choice we will now have in our product line-up, we will now be better positioned to achieve our objective and break the monopoly," said Ruiz passionately. "With ATI and AMD joining forces, we are now capable of taking innovation beyond the traditional boundaries of the CPU, GPU and chipsets as we know them today."



The implications of this merger will not be clear until 2008, but we can certainly begin making some assumptions already. The executives from both companies made it clear that the move would not only dramatically strengthen their position in the microprocessor market (we can expect that a lot of this combined might will be plumped into mobile computing and mobile consumer electronics devices like cellphones and even high-end media centre systems), but that it would also allow the organisation to create more customer-focussed application-specific offerings within the PC ecosystems.

When all is said and done, however, we, the gamers and PC enthusiasts, have been awaiting a response from the green CPU vendor since the Conroe architecture came out, and we'd say that this news is as emphatic a reply as we could have hoped for. It also goes to show how quickly fortunes can change in this market. Intel, although clearly the technology leader in the PC microprocessor architecture at this moment, has suddenly been headed off by market machinations and is once more under serious threat. The acquisition can only be finalised by Q4 this year, giving the company a good six months or so to plan and prepare, but it has to know that an onslaught is coming from some direction or another with this announcement.

AWARDS

THE NAG HARDWARE AWARD is reserved for those products that really blow us away, whether by virtue of sheer grunt, value for money, or pure unspecified sexiness. This award will only be bestowed upon products that really stand out, even to our somewhat jaded and cynical eyes, and should be considered among the primary choices when purchasing products in the respective categories. Products that receive this accolade are beyond a doubt rather special. So watch out for them and take note!



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OUR HARDWARE APPROACH

AT NAG, WE HAVE a very malleable approach to testing the latest hardware for you, and we define the test procedures on a more or less product-by-product basis. Due to the wide range of hardware we are asked to review, a single policy cannot be laid out and strictly adhered to.

In addition, the number of products that arrive at our office every month is so vast that it's only a prime selection that even reaches these printed pages you read. We also try to include the hardware that PC and gaming enthusiasts would like to find out more about.

Therefore, at NAG our review process, although rooted in a technical background and based on solid benchmark data, is largely objective and as such, is our objective opinion of the samples we receive. Moreover, we've been exposed to so much technology in our collective years in this vocation that these opinions are, we like to believe, among the most educated in the country.

So we run all the requisite benchmarks, like FutureMark's synthetic 3DMark series, the latest system-heavy gaming titles (*F.E.A.R.* and *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* are two that spring to mind right off the bat), and more specialised benchmarking suites like Everest (specifically for RAM performance) and SiSoft Sandra 2005, which is very good at measuring CPU performance.

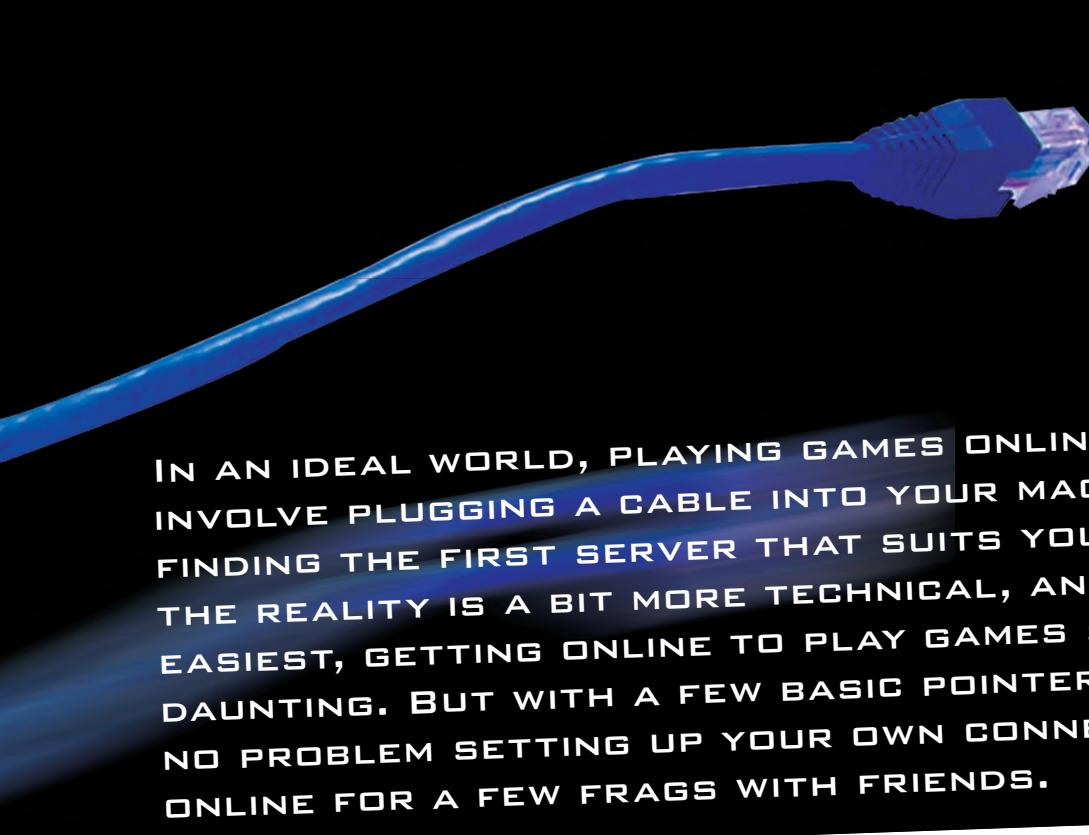
What's most important to us is that we get a detailed impression of the reality of using the equipment being reviewed. While that impression naturally includes 'The Numbers' from the various benches, these don't always reflect the absolute, final verdict. It's possible that we, from time-to-time, prefer a package that may not score the highest during testing, and where that is the reality, we'll explain our rationale.

After all, our goal is to provide you, the reader, with the most accurate information about how satisfied you will be with your purchase.

So enjoy reading about the latest and greatest hardware in the pages to follow, which we have slaved over so that you can make the most educated choice possible in your next hardware purchase.

SO YOU WANT TO PLAY ONLINE





IN AN IDEAL WORLD, PLAYING GAMES ONLINE SHOULD INVOLVE PLUGGING A CABLE INTO YOUR MACHINE AND FINDING THE FIRST SERVER THAT SUITS YOUR FANCY. BUT THE REALITY IS A BIT MORE TECHNICAL, AND EVEN AT ITS EASIEST, GETTING ONLINE TO PLAY GAMES SEEMS VERY DAUNTING. BUT WITH A FEW BASIC POINTERS, YOU'LL HAVE NO PROBLEM SETTING UP YOUR OWN CONNECTION AND GOING ONLINE FOR A FEW FRAGS WITH FRIENDS.

THE BASICS

The essential part to getting online is an Internet connection. Contrary to popular belief, ADSL isn't the best for online gaming, unless you can get an unshaped account. The thing you want to look for is the ping: the time it takes for the server to respond to your machine. Dual-ISDN is often reliable for playing on the Web, especially if you stick to local servers. All ISDN installations provide two lines out – dual-ISDN involves dialling into your ISP twice, but make sure your ISP approves of this. Unfortunately, a 56K modem connection is simply not worth it.

In most cases, this will be enough. If you opt for ADSL, try to get a router with an ADSL modem built in. Internet Connection Sharing (ICS) often results in higher pings, plus a central modem is just much more convenient, especially if you intend to go online with a console.

The holy grail for top gaming speeds is an unshaped ADSL account. Be wary, though, as some ISPs sell shaped accounts and advertise them as unshaped. Wireless broadband also has a lot of potential for online play, but your signal strength and connection consistency will dictate this.

FIREWALLS

One device that might cause many problems is your firewall. If you run a permanent connection such as ADSL, it's wise to run one. But firewalls can also cause higher pings and simply no connectivity at all. Most firewall software packages will bring up a prompt asking if the game should be allowed a connection. You can also set up profiles for games to streamline the process.

Routers with modems can add an additional spanner in the works here. Most modern ADSL routers have their own firewall software installed. Often, games can go through anyway, but

sometimes the same problems as with PC-based firewalls can emerge. The best way is to log onto your router as an administrator and set up a profile for your game. This will often not even be necessary, but if you experience connection problems or high lag, take a look at what your firewall is up to. If you intend to host a game, a firewall can cause major hassles if it doesn't recognise the traffic.

FINDING A SERVER

To play online you need to find someone to play against or with. Servers are where gamers congregate and play, so finding the one with the lowest ping will be your first step. Most of the time, this means getting onto a local PC gaming server such as at the SAIX Games network (<http://games.saix.net>). The PC game's internal network browser is where you connect to a game. If you have the specific port and IP for a game server, you can add it manually or you can let the game find active servers online. The downside to this approach is that often the servers listed are international and have high pings. But you can usually find servers with reasonable response times.

In terms of ping, the value depends on the type of game you play as well as how patient you are. The absolute highest ping you should attempt is 300 (though some MMOs will tolerate up to 400). Usually, dual-ISDN and ADSL can provide around 150 to 200 to international servers, while locally, speeds can decrease to below 100. There are players who also move below 50, but best plan to get unshaped ADSL if you want that. The application also depends on the type of game you play. A ping over 120 isn't good for a fast action game or racing around a track, but higher pings can still sustain some MMOs and titles designed not to demand high speeds (*Rockstar's Table Tennis* for Xbox 360 and the free *Trackmania*

Nations for PC are two examples of this).

360 LIVE

Apart from playing online with your PC, you can also take a console to the Web. The Xbox 360 caters for this with ease. The hardest part is to connect the console to a broadband modem via an Ethernet cable. Then go to the online setup section and give the console an IP address along with the network's subnet mask. Finally, add the IP of the router/Internet sharing machine as the gateway. This should do the trick. It's not smart to try using a next-generation console on anything less than ADSL 512. Apart from the demand for good pings, since most services and players are still based abroad, updates and other downloads can also be fairly bandwidth demanding. Thankfully, after the initial updates, these come infrequently while patches for games tend to stay small.

After plugging in and going online, simply load your preferred game and join a match. There's a trick here that will help you find faster games. If the consoles playing the game are all based locally, the pings are significantly lower. Through Live, it is easy to track 'Friends' on your profile. Check out a local community site such as www.xbox-360.co.za to find someone eager to take you on. It's also a matter of experimentation. Some games demand a lot in terms of ping, while others are highly tolerant of it.

GET GOING!

Playing online is not hard to start, but you'll learn a few lessons along the way. Be careful of abuse and ignore it when dished out at you. Respect the rules of the server and remember that you are sharing the game world with other people who want to have fun as well. You'll soon make new friends and find more people to play against. **NAG**

HARDWARE

SPARKLE CALIBRE 7900 GT



IT IS INCREDIBLE JUST how hot our gaming and enthusiast markets have become of late! Yet another name leaping into the fray in this review is graphics-board manufacturer Sparkle, which is expanding its Calibre range of enthusiast-orientated cards with this, the Calibre GeForce 7900 GT.

The enthusiast focus is apparent from the moment you look at the packaging. Eschewing its normally colourful box, splashed with 3D-rendered woodland creatures (often a kangaroo in Sparkle's case), for a plain black container with a slightly irregular shape, this Calibre would really stand out on a crowded retail shelf. Open it up, however, and the bundle is not particularly unusual, including a full copy of *Painkiller* and some CyberLink DVD utilities, as well as the standard array of Video-in and -out connectors.

Fortunately, the card itself is more appealing, even from a purely aesthetic point of view. Again, probably the plain black-and-white colour scheme does it. In this case, the custom HSF is painted entirely in the shadowy hue with a white unicorn graphic attached. This HSF not only looks the bit in our opinion, but proved to be quiet right through our testing process as well.

Normally, the G71 core and GDDR3 RAM of a 7900 GT are clocked at 450MHz and 1.32GHz respectively. This Calibre model might not go to the extremes of, for instance, the XFX range, but then, this company has been catering nearly exclusively to the hardcore audience for a lot longer now. The 500MHz core and 1.4GHz RAM of the Calibre are respectable enough boosts over stock speeds, and they allow this card to remain comparatively quiet at all times without any concerns over the temperature of the GPU core.

What's more, the Calibre was rock solid throughout our testing processes. Moreover, in the process, this card recorded some excellent overall performance figures, eclipsing the numbers posted by conventional 7900 GTs with a seemingly nonchalant ease. In 3DMark06, the Sparkle offering managed 5,136 at the standard settings of 1,280 x 1,024 without AA

or AF enabled, and still managed to push out a result of 4,340 with the same quality settings, but the resolution shoved up to 1,600 x 1,200. It must be said though, that it is always disappointing not to be able to benchmark NVIDIA cards in 3DMark06 using AA and AF, as this disables the HDR functionality and automatically deselects the HDR portion of the benchmark run. In no way Sparkle's problem, but there you go. If anything, this board was even more impressive under real world gaming tests. The Calibre breezed through our F.E.A.R. benchmarking runs, and although it couldn't quite deliver playable framerates at 1,600 x 1,200 with everything maxed out, it could manage maximum detail at 1,280 x 1,024 without much jerkiness at all. Even in the latest 3D shooter in the office, *Prey*, the Calibre 7900 refused to give in, managing to stay above playable framerates with all details pushed to their limits, albeit at the 'old-school' resolution of 1,024 x 768.

The mere fact that this card can hit these frequencies comfortably is no surprise. We've been remarking on the overclocking potential of 7900 GT cards since they launched. It's how cohesive, stable and attractive a package the Calibre is that we're quite happy about. That said, this card wasn't able to overclock much further, and we managed a meagre 520MHz and 1.56GHz respectively when we fiddled with NVIDIA CoolBits, which yielded similarly minor performance advantages without affecting the temperature of the GPU much.

As factory-overclocked examples of mid- to high-end graphics cards go, the Sparkle Calibre 7900 GT is a good one. Not so extreme as to cause any compromises on stability, but enough to provide a useful performance boost over standard items. In addition, the packaging and similarly discrete but aggressive HSF styling are the little things that we notice and appreciate, and the company scores full marks here.

Overall, we'd recommend the Calibre 7900 GT to anyone looking for high-end performance at a more wallet-friendly price point than today's GPU monsters. It looks good, goes great, and would absolutely rock in SLI! **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
• Lovely HSF
• Very strong performance
Cons
• Lacklustre bundle
Supplier
Eurobyte [011] 234-0142
Internet
www.sparkle.com.tw
RRP
R3,890
Reviewer
Russell Bennett

SPECS

GPU
NVIDIA G71
Core clock
500MHz
Memory clock
1,400MHz
Memory type
512MB GDDR3 (1.4ms)
Memory interface
256-bit
Pixel pipes
24
Vertexshaders
8
ROPs
16

Matte-black HSF with Calibre unicorn logo looks awesome - and won't show up dust easily!



ASUS EN7600GS TOP SILENT

SINCE GRAPHICS CARDS ARE so expensive locally, they can often take up most of the budget, leaving the system woefully underpowered in some way.

Fortunately, NVIDIA has replaced the old 6600-series parts with 7-series GPUs that are faster than their older counterparts, even at the same clockspeed. The 7600GS is based on the G73 chip, which has 12 pixel pipelines and five vertex units, and uses a 128-bit memory bus. This makes it roughly half a 7900GT, which uses 24 pixel pipes, and eight vertex units on a 256-bit bus. In general, GTX is the top-end part (formerly 'Ultra'), GT is the high-end but not extreme part (formerly 'Pro'), and GS is usually a re-release of a GT part as a cheaper and slightly slower version. The 7600GS specifies a 400MHz core and 800MHz (400DDR) memory. It also uses cheaper DDR2 RAM, instead of the more expensive GDDR3 memory found on higher performing parts.

Asus's card is a little non-standard. They ship it with a 550MHz GPU and 950MHz (475DDR) for the RAM. They also put 512MB of memory onboard, whereas most 7600GS cards ship with 256MB. The RAM size may not have a huge impact on most games at settings this card is capable of running, but the increased clockspeeds definitely will.

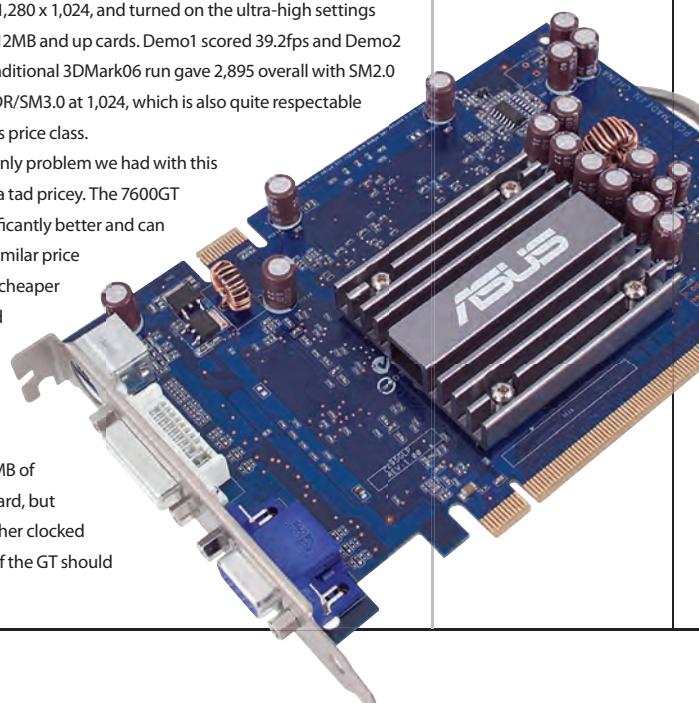
Another non-standard change is Asus's 'Reverse Cool' system. Essentially, they've flipped the card so that the chips are on the opposite side, as is the main part of the heatpipe cooler. This is what the 'Silent' part of the name means. This might be a little inconvenient on some motherboards where things are a bit cramped above the top slot, but the heatsink itself is not overly large, so it is not likely to cause a huge problem in most cases.

Performance-wise, we got some pretty good benchmark numbers out of this card. We gave F.E.A.R. a run on medium settings at 1,024 x 768, considering most people looking at this class of card will be happy to get their games running decently and less concerned about incredible settings. The results were good, with a minimum of 47fps, an average of 78fps, and a maximum of 172fps. For a more high-end experience, we loaded the 'hocbench.com' Prey benchmark at 1,280 x 1,024, and turned on the ultra-high settings designed for 512MB and up cards. Demo1 scored 39.2fps and Demo2 36.0fps. The traditional 3DMark06 run gave 2,895 overall with SM2.0 at 1,150 and HDR/SM3.0 at 1,024, which is also quite respectable for a card in this price class.

About the only problem we had with this

card is that it's a tad pricey. The 7600GT performs significantly better and can be found in a similar price range, or even cheaper if you look hard enough.

Granted, most of these cards only have 256MB of memory onboard, but overall, the higher clocked performance of the GT should win. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Won't break the bank
- Decent performance even at ultra-high
- 512MB of memory

■ Cons

- 7600GT 256MB is faster for about the same price

■ Supplier

Asus SA [011] 783-5450

■ Internet

www.asus.com

■ RRP

R1,895

■ Reviewer

Toby Hudon

SPECS

■ GPU

NVIDIA G73

■ Pipelines

12 pixel, 5 vertex

■ Memory

512MB DDR2

■ Bandwidth

15.2GB/s

■ Interface

PCI Express

■ Bus

128-bit



CWR-901 Smart Wizard technology gives you the swift route to Internet access with Smart Wizard automatically detects your ISP settings, and walks you through the setup process with easy-to-follow instructions.

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- MAC address control, 64-bit and 128-bit WEP and WPA/ (Wi-Fi Protected Access)
- Supports WDS function to extend your wireless scope.



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ZALMAN FATAL1TY CHAMPION SERIES CHASSIS

IF THE SPELLING OF Fatal1ty looks a bit odd to you, you may be a bit out of touch with the gaming world. Jonathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel is considered the number one competitive gamer in the world. This has secured him sponsorships with various hardware companies, who put his name on their products.

Unlike some other pro athletes, who just sign away their names to use on whatever gets them cash, Fatal1ty likes to have an active part in the design process of anything his seal of approval gets stamped on. Therefore, you can expect to see exclusive innovations and designs that other companies may not be using, as Jonathan is very specific about what he does and does not like in his gaming rigs. Zalman has been producing heatsinks with the Fatal1ty brand for some time, and has now ventured into the realm of cases.

The first thing you'll likely notice about this particular case is that it's solid. By that, we mean that it uses massive slabs of aluminium for the entire structure that are about half a centimetre thick. While this definitely makes the case quite a bit heavier than many popular 'LAN-party' class cases, it's certainly going to prevent it from easily denting. The nice brushed-metal black also doesn't scratch too easily or attract dust. Overall, it resembles a jet fighter more than anything, and the various bits of text stencilled on add to the effect. Zalman has stencilled on little warnings about things like the no-maintenance hinges, not removing certain panels that are critical to the case structure, and even one about using protective eyewear when viewing internal components through the case's window. While this all seems a bit frivolous, it certainly gives the case a bit more charm than a featureless black box.

The case sports a few nice features. The fans, power, and reset LEDs are all colour-coordinated red. The front panel has space for two USB 2.0 ports, a FireWire port, headphone and microphone jacks, and an all-in-one card reader for most flash formats in the 3.5-inch bay, which you could replace with a floppy drive if you actually still have a use for one. Internally, the layout is pretty good, and there are vents in the bottom of the case to aid airflow. The twin front 80mm fans come with an adapter to run them at either 12V or 5V depending on which plug you connect, providing the option of better cooling or lower noise.

One of the real innovations is the hard drive mounting system in this case. Instead of using screw-on rails that are popular in many cases, the drive bays have rubber-coated rollers. To insert a hard drive, you just push it in against the stiff resistance of the

rollers, which hold it. Then a strap wraps across the end of the drive, and hooks on a screw on the opposite side of the bay. This secures the drive nicely and has the added benefit that the retaining strap can also keep cables in a good position, instead of letting them approximate a bird's nest. There is room for three 3.5-inch drives. The four 5.25-inch bays are a bit more traditional and just use normal screws.

There are also a couple of minor annoyances as well, such as needing an Allen key to open the far side of the 5.25-inch bays. The case comes with one, but losing it or forgetting it at home while at a LAN could prove frustrating. In addition, the slots use break-off covers instead of the reusable kind, which is a minus. The most frustrating feature, though, is the lever to open the door. While it is nice while the case is upright, if you lay it down flat to install a motherboard and haven't opened the door, you'll have to stand it up again. The one time we tried to be clever, pry it up, and slide a finger in, resulted in the loss of a small part of the finger and a significant amount of blood. Hopefully this will be fixed in the next revision of the case, but overall, it's not a bad choice and looks great. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

- Great looks
- Solid construction
- Innovative hard drive bays

Cons

- Nonstandard screws
- Can only open while upright
- Break-off slot covers

Supplier

Frontosa [011] 466-0038

Internet

www.zalman.co.kr

RRP

R3,599

Reviewer

Toby Hudon

SPECS

Dimensions (H x W x D)

480mm x 220mm x 430mm

Weight

~12kg empty (no PSU)

Materials

5mm aluminium

Expansion bays

4 x 5.25-inch, 3 x 3.5-inch + 1 x external

Extras

1 x 120mm LED fan, 2 x 92mm LED fans

Do not, whatever you do, kick this chassis! You WILL break bones



FOXCONN 975X7AA

AS THE MONIKER SUGGESTS, this board is built around the Intel 975X chipset, which, although not the freshest of Intel platforms (that would be the 965, bizarrely), is widely recognised as the highest performing of the breed.

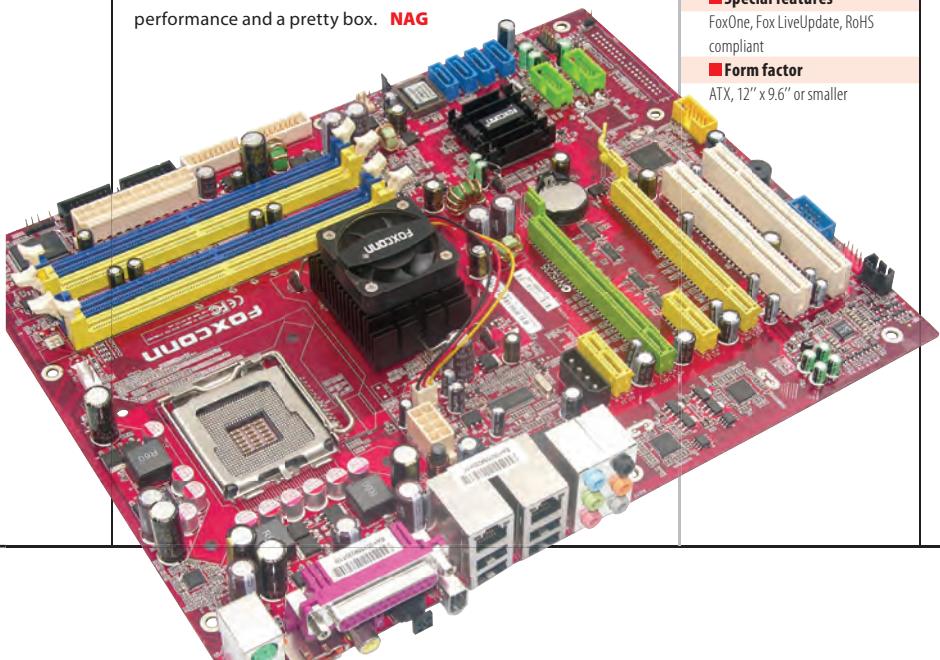
What Foxconn then adds into this mix is a pleasing bundle wrapped in an eye-catching golden package. There are also two PEG slots supporting ATI CrossFire dual-GPU solutions, albeit by splitting these lanes down to eight per slot in such a setup. There are also two 1x PCI-E slots, and two regular PCI slots, for further upgradeability - dual-Gigabit onboard LAN and Intel HD audio subsystems round off the board's features.

Upon first booting the machine, this board refused to detect our 965 XE CPU running at its stock frequency of 3.73GHz per core, instead clocking it down to the speed of its predecessor, the 955. This did not bode well for the "automatic overclocking" function called intelligent stepping - turning this feature on actually resulted in our CPU being under clocked!

The FoxOne Windows applet is just like all software-based overclocking tools – a bit of a 'manufacturer's joke'. The layout and presentation are fine, if a little child-orientated, but the functionality is rather poor, with the board all too often simply refusing to run at the newly applied frequencies, or worse still, locking up as the upped speeds are applied.

Venturing into the BIOS revealed, at first glance, all the tweaking options the enthusiast might need. However, there's a crucial bit missing here as well – a memory divider. This means your RAM speed is absolutely locked to your FSB speed, and with the stock FSB of our XE CPU at 266MHz, and this being set to DDR2-667 as the default setting, clocking your hardcore enthusiast RAM up to 800MHz means clocking your FSB up to 320MHz. And don't even think of gunning for 1,000MHz-plus DDR2.

That said, the board is capable of overclocking the CPU itself fairly well, with our CPU comfortably exceeding 4.2GHz per core with some added voltage and an Arctic Cooling Freezer 7 Pro installed. But we have to hope that Foxconn fixes that RAM tweaking problem as soon as possible, since until it does, the 975X7AA is no more than a mid-range part with good stock performance and a pretty box. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Good stock performance
- Cons
- Not the overclocking monster promised

■ Supplier

Pinnacle [011] 265-3000

■ Internet

www.foxconnchannel.com

■ RRP

R1,795

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SPECS

■ Processor

Supports compatible Intel Socket 775 processors

■ Chipset

Intel 975X Express + ICH7R

■ Memory

Dual-channel, un-buffered, 1.8V DDR2-533/667 w/ or w/o ECC; (4) 240-pin DIMM sockets, max 8GB

■ Graphics

2 x PEG slots supporting CrossFire

■ Expansion slots

2 x PCI Express 1x, 2 x PCI

■ IDE/ATA support

1 x ATA/100 + 4 x SATA II/300 (w/ RAID)

Supports RAID 0, 1, 5, 10, and Intel Matrix Storage Technology (1+0 on 2 HDDs)

Includes second SATA RAID controller, 1 internal + 1 rear panel/external connector (supports RAID 0 and 1)

■ Audio

Integrated, 7.1 channel High Definition (Realtek)

■ LAN

Dual integrated Gigabit Ethernet (10/100/1,000) controllers, dual ports (Marvell)

■ Rear I/O ports

1 x PS/2 keyboard, 1 x PS/2 mouse, 2 x RJ-45 (LAN), 4 x USB 2.0, 1 x line-in/line-out/mic (audio), 1 x parallel (SPP/ECP/EPP), Additional line-outs for 7.1 channel audio, 1 x IEEE 1394, 2 x S/PDIF (1 x coax out + 1 x optical out)

■ Internal connectors/headers

1 x floppy disk drive, Front audio header, 2 x USB 2.0-port headers, 1 x IEEE 1394 header

■ Special features

FoxOne, Fox LiveUpdate, RoHS compliant

■ Form factor

ATX, 12" x 9.6" or smaller

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Tough Atomic Energy
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Blue LED 12 cm Fan
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DIMENSION : 120 x 120 x 25 mm
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TEMP. Auto Control



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- Industrial Grade Components
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- Silent 120mm Fan
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LOGITECH DRIVEFX AXIAL FEEDBACK WHEEL FOR XBOX 360

IDEALLY, A STEERING WHEEL should have at least a 90-degree turning arc. Your average steering wheel product has around 240 degrees. The DriveFX sits at a slightly depressing 200 - something that no amount of force-feedback in the world could help with.

Regardless, the DriveFX is a comfortable wheel setup that draws from an external power brick. It has all the buttons from the Xbox 360's controller, as well as a Guide button. The wheel has rather comfortable rubber grips, and the entire setup locks to a surface edge using a dual-point clamp system. The pedals (accelerate and brake) are sturdy and offer a fair amount of pushback.

At the back of the unit is a plug for the Xbox Live headset, a very useful addition and much appreciated.

Unfortunately, you cannot adjust the dead zone of the wheel, though out-of-the-box it works fine with *Project Gotham Racing 3*. The force-feedback seemed a bit off, either underpowered or not calibrated to give the right feedback.

The construction of the wheel is solid and firm, although the



plastic unit, from which the wheel stems, still feels slightly rickety.

Overall, Logitech makes a good Racing wheel with the performance to back it up, though the more professional-minded should rather be on the lookout for a wheel with a 900-degree turning arc. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Solid, comfortable wheel with rubber grip

■ Cons

- Can't turn on a spoon

■ Supplier

Logitech SA [011] 656-3376

■ Internet

www.logitech.com

■ RRP

R999

■ Reviewer

Miktar Dracon



THRUSTMASTER STEREO SPEAKER FOR PSP

THESSE TYPES OF PRODUCTS are difficult to review, since they are for the most part pure frivolity. The Thrustmaster Stereo Speaker is basically a little docking

station that your PSP plugs into, with the goal of using the docking station's speakers. The dock has a backlight, headphone plug and a power plug that can connect to the PSP's power adapter or, more useful, the included USB power cable.

The station's speakers are tiny, mostly tinny and wholly uninspired. An included car-charging kit works, and the USB charge cable 'rolls up' nicely for storage. The slot into which the PSP snaps, can be swivelled forwards and backwards to get a comfortable view angle, one would assume.

The construction of the unit is slightly flimsy. The plastic used would not survive a drop from hand-height, and would most likely shatter into several pieces like a Fabergé egg.

There are many such products on the market, some better than this, some worse. Considering the price tag, a wholesome amount of research is recommended before settling on a purchase, especially when it comes to accessories for the PSP. These days, it seems every company out there is trying to make a quick buck with superficial accessories for the PSP. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- USB charge cable
- Backlit

■ Cons

- Poor speakers

■ Supplier

MobileG 084 245 5400

■ Internet

www.thrustmaster.com

■ RRP

R465

■ Reviewer

Miktar Dracon



CORSAIR TWINX XMS2-6400

THE IS STILL a lot of debate about the feasibility of DDR2 as a replacement for DDR, particularly in the gaming segment. The trade-off between increased bandwidth and higher latency has until now all but negated the throughput benefit, which is a direct result of the much faster frequencies the newer RAM modules can run at.

This latency problem is in fact further compounded by the growing need for more memory capacity. Although 1GB was more than sufficient 12 months ago, today's gaming rigs really need at least 2GB to get any respect at the local LAN party. However, stuffing 1GB of RAM chips onto a single stick, and keeping the latency timings to within reasonable levels, has proven difficult for all the major memory manufacturers.

Corsair is one of the leaders in RAM technology, and its latest 8500 (1,066MHz) parts are in the retail channel already, but on test here are the somewhat more conventional Corsair XMS2-6400 modules.

That's still an 800MHz RAM frequency, officially the highest supported speed that DDR2 can run at, although BIOS tweaking can result in exceeding this ceiling easily on most modern gaming boards. To give these Corsair modules the best opportunity to shine, we built a test system around a 965 XE CPU on a Gigabyte Royal board using an Intel 955 chipset.

At 800MHz, the Corsair RAM clocks itself via SPD at the relatively sluggish (especially if you were a DDR user until last week) timings of 5-5-5-15. However, in our testing we found that with an additional 0.2V the Corsair parts had no trouble running at their rated 4-4-4-12 at this clock frequency.

The more aggressive timings didn't have a noticeable impact on the Everest Ultimate Edition RAM benchmark results, although the Corsair modules were already posting decent numbers at their slower SPD setting. At 4-4-4-12, these modules were reading data at 5,924MB/s with a latency of 76.5ns, compared to 5,886MB/s and 77.8ns at 5-5-5-15. Not bad for DDR2 parts, considering that the ValuerAM clocked at 667MHz, which usually runs in our test platform, couldn't even manage to dip below 90ns.

However, when it came to eking some more grunt from the cool black heatspreader-shrouded modules, we were surprised to find that there was no more to give. We couldn't tighten timings, nor increase the frequency without massive system instability, even if we upped the DIMM voltage to 0.4V, at which point those heatspreaders would start to get alarmingly warm.

Still, if you're looking for DDR2, which you'll never run at more than 800MHz, these remain some of the best you can buy. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

- Pros
 - Great at rated speeds
- Cons
 - Not so great beyond them
- Supplier
 - Jack Blue [011] 918-8280
- Internet
 - wwwcorsairmemory.com
- RRP
 - R2,055 (2 x 512MB)
- Reviewer
 - Russell Bennett

SPECS

- PCB
 - 6-layer
- Heatspreaders
 - Black XMS2
- DDR rating
 - DDR2-6400 (800MHz)
- Timings
 - 4-4-4-12
- Pins
 - 240 DIMM
- ICs
 - Micron

Black XMS heatspreaders are familiar to enthusiasts, and these modules deliver on their promise - but not beyond this point

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Piano 101
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- Adjustable fanspeed
- 2.1 Surround system
- Sound Equalizer



Model: Piano 101 Black

- Total RMS power (RMS):15watts
- Satellites:5W x 2
- Subwoofer:5W x1
- Frequency response:60Hz - 20kHz
- Signal-to-noise ratio:> 80db

Drivers:

- Satellites:2 x 1.5" Full-range drivers +2 x 1"
- High-range drivers
- Subwoofer:2" woofer

Speaker dimensions:

- Satellites:(H)19.0 x (L) 100 x (W)40 (mm)
- Subwoofer:(H)26.0 x (L)120 x (W) 60 (mm)



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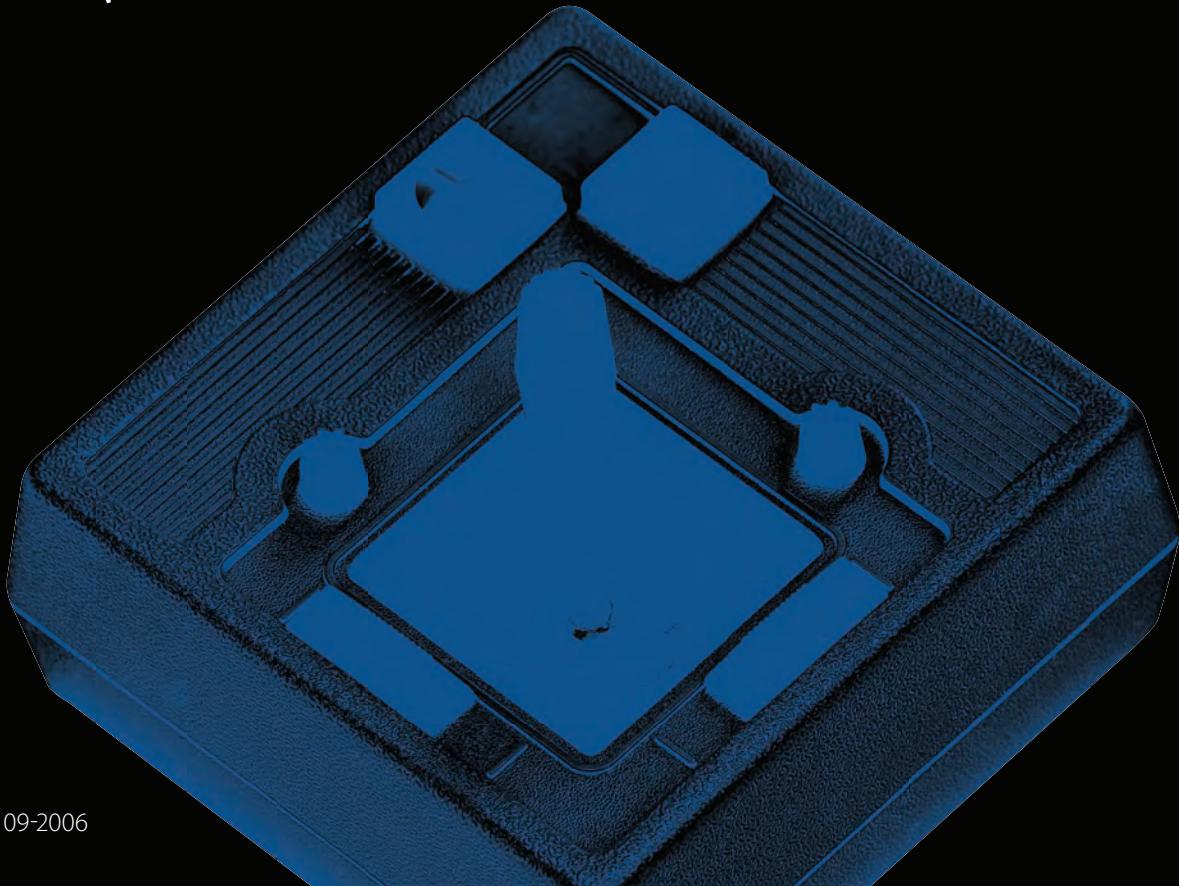
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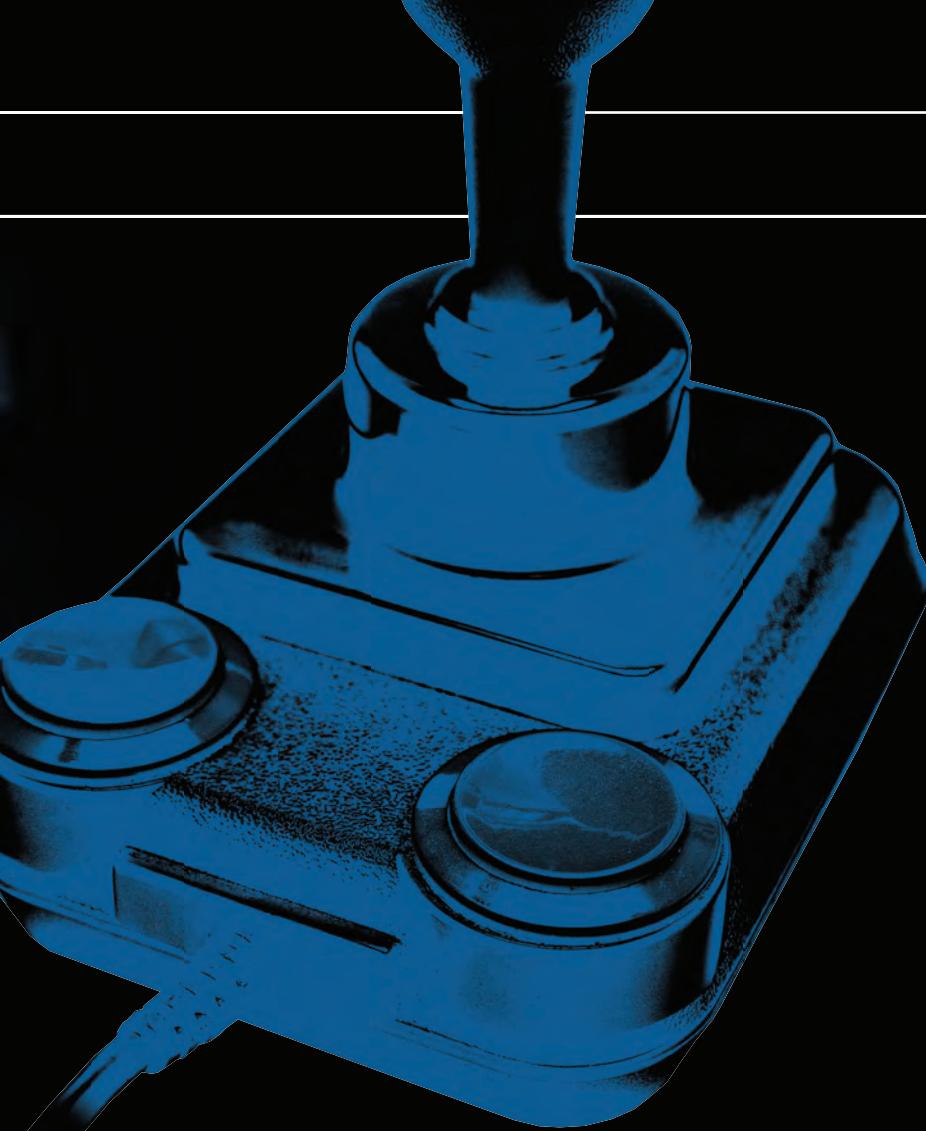
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IF YOU'RE TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TIME AND INVESTMENT IN THE AWESOME PASTIME CALLED PC GAMING, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED TO INVEST SOME DOUGH IN YOUR 'COMMAND CENTRE' OF CONTROLLERS. THERE ARE SO MANY PURELY GAMING-FOCUSSED INPUT DEVICES THESE DAYS THAT IT NO LONGER MAKES MUCH SENSE USING PRODUCTS TARGETED AT THE ORDINARY CONSUMER FOR HARDCORE GAMING PURPOSES. THEREFORE, WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER OUR SHORTLIST OF PRECISELY WHAT YOU NEED TO HAVE IN THIS ISSUE'S H@RDCOR3 ROUNDUP!





HI.D. NOT A PAST-TENSE verb all in uppercase, but an acronym. It stands for Human Interface Device, and it is a wide description to say the least. Specifying 'gaming' before these three letters barely narrows the scope either, as these days a wide variety of gaming-focussed hardware exists, including a full range of input devices developed and marketed for our particular niche.

It was for this reason, that our H@rdcor3 brief to our suppliers for this issue of NAG was perhaps too non-specific. Originally we had intended this roundup to be a showcase of all the best 'traditional' gaming HID's available in the SA market, meaning joysticks, steering wheels and the more modern equivalent, the gamepad. Unfortunately, our vague brief had suppliers eagerly sending through their latest flavour of HID in every shape, size and form, including a good selection of mice and specialised keyboards, as well as the joysticks we were looking for.

Since different types of games require different mechanisms of input, depending on the entirely subjective and personal tastes of the player using the HID as well as the specific requirements of the best manner of control for a situation, we've grouped our entrants into segments based on their device type. In this month's H@rdcor3, we're focussing on flight, platforms and the FPS as our three major genres for a selection pool criteria.

The time-old motto of "The right tool for the job" could not be any more appropriate. It's clear the moment you try that the entirely digital nature of the keyboard, for instance, is simply not suited to the task of controlling a fidgety, simulated racecar. Nor is the top hat and thumb-trigger style of a good flight-sim joystick going to do you any favours in the latest fast-paced 3D shooter. In each case, the input mechanism needs to fit in with the game being played, and more importantly, your own style of playing, to achieve the realism needed for some solid gaming escapism, or the control required to actually enjoy the digital world so beautifully rendered by today's powerful hardware.

Now even with the scope narrowed down to just the three genres, there's still an enormous amount of hardware on offer for us to choose from, and since we do have a limited page count, we had to whittle this lengthy list down to just our favourite selections. Many good products may have fallen by the wayside, but we believe what we've ended up with represents the pinnacle in each category – which makes this slightly different to our conventional H@rdcor3 roundup, as we won't be selecting a single product to be our overall winner. Instead, we'll be highlighting especially interesting options in each genre with the NAG hardware award, but at the end of the day, all of the units on test are solid choices. In addition, if you're as in love with your gaming as we are, you'd probably appreciate each and every one, but this is a H@rdcor3 roundup after all, so we will be offering our considered opinions on the finest on offer.



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- * Advanced Universal Silicon Tuner
- * Supports PAL / SECAM / NTSC
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VideoMate U880

USB 2.0 TV Stick

Thumb Drive Size



- * Thumb Size Plug&Play USB 2.0 TV Stick
- * Watch & Record Analog TV on your desktop or Laptop PC
- * Advanced Universal Silicon Tuner
- * Supports PAL / SECAM / NTSC
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THE KEYBOARD

The very essence of the PC. They've been around since the PC was born, and although one day they'll no doubt fall to some sci-fi creation, the keyboard is synonymous with PC gaming, or PC usage in any form for that matter.

LOGITECH G15

SUPPLIER: Logitech SA [011] 656-3376

MANUFACTURER: Logitech

PRICE: R649

THE G15 IS A less extreme interpretation of the gaming keyboard concept, but although less radical looking, it packs many intriguing innovations. And here we must take a moment to expand on our original review of the G15, in which we complained that the integrated LCD screen was far too limited in application, supporting very few games at all.

Since that first look, we toyed some more with the LCD SDK included with the G15 software bundle, and discovered just how easy it is to populate this fold-away screen with useful data, both from the game and the background system. Many gamers in the country have discovered the usefulness of this applet for themselves, and the G15 is already a firm favourite among the hardcore.

The G15, although remarkably plain-looking, lights up with cool, illuminated keys for night-time gaming when you first power it up, and it includes the standard array of multimedia control functions, and an additional 18 'G' macro-keys, which can make the G15 a powerful tool in the right hands.

There are, naturally, drawbacks. The macro-programmable

'G' keys have already resulted in calls of "cheat" in certain online games in which macros are specifically disallowed for the sake of fairness of play,

Nonetheless, the G15 is an example of an entirely different take on the gaming keyboard, and you have to give it credit because it does it all right.



ZBOARD

SUPPLIER: Frontosa [011] 466-0039

MANUFACTURER: Ideazon

PRICE: R449

WE USED TO ENTER text into our green-screen DOS systems using an 88-key device, for instance. Now we can't get anything less than 101, and more frequently far more than this figure. The keyboard has only more recently been bravely edited and rebuilt to better suit the needs of the hardcore gamer, hence the creation of the fairly young company Ideazon, and its ZBoard gaming 'deck'.

The ZBoard was a brilliant idea that kicked off the trend of modifying everyday devices like the keyboard for optimum gaming ability. It features a base with an easily removable keyset for switching between the conventional keyboard and the gaming-specific layout, both of which are included with the standard product.

There's also some nifty software, called the ZEngine, which in its latest incarnation, allows for drag-and-drop remapping of every key on your ZBoard. Not that you have to use it that much, as the company includes mod files for over 70 of the most popular games that the keyboard will automatically map to whenever you load one of these titles. What's more, the ZBoard avoids annoying key conflicts by using a controller that will recognise and respond with as many as seven keys pressed, all at once.

We can't fault the technology, or the rugged, solid construction. However, it is worth noting that the gaming keyset is really difficult to get used to when using your PC for other duties, so you'll find yourself having to switch all the time, or more frequently stick purely to the typing keyset since you're so used to using this layout already anyway. Thankfully, switching isn't much of a chore at all when you do want to take advantage of its pure gaming focus.

For us, the real kicker has to be the 'extra' limited edition keysets which, given an unlimited budget, you can buy a bunch of for

your ZBoard for specific optimisations for specific games. The extensive range includes titles in all genres, such as *Call of Duty 2*, *Guild Wars*, *Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-earth*, and many more. It's the stunning artwork on these keysets that wows us every time, although specifically labelled buttons for your favourite game is also, naturally, a bonus.



ZALMAN

FATAL1TY



ZBOARD FANG

SUPPLIER: Frontosa [011] 466-0039

MANUFACTURER: Ideazon

PRICE: R379

THIS LITTLE BABY IS for those who can't give up their faithful keyboard at all, but want the advantages of a specifically crafted gaming keypad. The FANG is a standalone gaming keypad, featuring 41 keys in an ambidextrous and mobile design. The FANG completes Ideazon's three-pronged take on the gaming keyboard, and ultimately it is well worth a try if the ZBoard is too extreme for you, or the MERC too clunky.

Disappointments with the FANG? It isn't actually all that compact and mobile, and it's the least substantial of all the ZBoard offerings, making it feel the most prone to damage sustained during a high-adrenaline gaming session. It's also, quite obviously, the least versatile, and therefore only really for those who are really attached to their existing equipment.

ZBOARD MERC

SUPPLIER: Frontosa [011] 466-0039

MANUFACTURER: Ideazon

PRICE: R429

THE MERC IS THE slightly less-focussed product available from the company. It has no removable keyset area, but does feature a very nice, conventional, full-sized keyboard with a 'gaming zone' tacked onto an extra area to the left of the QWERTY zone. This space is tilted at 11 degrees for better comfort during extended periods of gaming, and features a similar butterfly layout and rounded keys to the normal ZBoard gaming keyset.

The MERC represents a good compromise between gaming and everyday use, but gave us more problems during the installation procedure than the classic ZBoard did. It's also solid, and both the QWERTY area and gaming zone keys feel durable, but the original is far more industrial and positive in every action. Where the ZBoard is all square edges and chunkiness, this version is far more organically shaped.

In the end though, the MERC does hit a perfect goal. Its pure gaming focus may be slightly compromised, but provides both office and gaming comfort in a single unit.



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THE MOUSE

This input device is almost as much a part of the PC gaming market as the keyboard, if somewhat younger overall. Can you recall when the mouse was still viewed with scepticism as a Windows 3.11 gimmick, and the gamer's woes as Sierra steadily replaced text input with mouse icons in its legendary adventure series? It happened, but the mouse is now as familiar as the ubiquitous Microsoft GUI, and the first-person shooter is an entirely different game because of it.

CREATIVE FATALITY 1010

SUPPLIER: Comztek 0800 600 557

MANUFACTURER: Creative Labs

PRICE: R599

THIS WAS THE FAMOUS audio company's first foray into the HID segment, and it clearly decided to come in waving, shouting, and generally making a bit of a ruckus with this unit – co-branded with the famous professional gamer's nick of course. The 1010 defies conventional mouse design in a number of ways to achieve what it believes could be the ultimate gaming weapon.

The main feature of the 1010 is that it is a true 3-button mouse in the modern world of 2-button ones (what at first appears to be the frame of the unit is actually the third button). It also features a switchable dpi configuration. Pressing the appropriate button cycles the mouse through 400dpi, 800dpi and 1,600dpi, with an LED telling you which option you're currently on. And finally, there are the G-weights, which can be easily interchanged for the 3.5g, 11g and 26g options to alter the weight of the unit overall.

The 1010 is excellent, very precise, and fast, but equally useable in Windows at the touch of the button, which drops it to 400dpi or 800 dpi. The weighting trick is really getting into the technical aspects of professional gaming, but to us seemed more like a gimmick really, and it results in the worst bit about the 1010: the fact that it is stock and rather ugly. This stubby quality also makes it feel rather unnatural, as your palm is not used in controlling the 1010 at all, only your fingers. Jonathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel might like that all the time, but we weren't so taken by having to modify our own styles to conform to our mouse.



TRUST PREDATOR GM4200

SUPPLIER: Pinnacle Micro [011] 265-3000

MANUFACTURER: Trust

PRICE: R199

TRUST IS NOT, IRONICALLY, a brand well known to SA consumers. In fact, the Trust Predator was the first product we had received to test from this manufacturer, now represented locally through Pinnacle.

The Predator is very conservatively styled, and more of a last-generation design than some others in this category. However, despite being bulkier and surprisingly comfortable for the arch of your hand, it is even lighter than the Razer is. It can also adapt sensitivity at the touch of a button, between 800dpi and 1,600dpi, and includes two thumb buttons and a single, large pinkie button.

The matte-black top and metallic-red surround make the bland shape look pretty good, but it's the feet that betray it as being slightly lower quality than the more expensive offerings in this roundup. They simply didn't slide as smoothly over our fabric-based mouse pad as the others, despite apparently being made of the same Teflon as most of our gaming mice.

It's a fairly no-frills package then, the Trust, but it does feature the word "Predator" emblazoned on its top, and technically offers all the sensitivity you'd need for god-like accuracy. It just doesn't quite measure up in pure, tactile feel.

RAZER DIAMONDBACK

SUPPLIER: Frontosa [011] 466-0039

MANUFACTURER: Razer

PRICE: R369

THIS IS THE OFFICIAL WCG (World Cyber Games) mouse of choice, and the 'middle' of three options in the Razer range. This company, like Ideazon, has been built entirely around the concept of a purely gaming-dedicated range of products, and its WCG connections allow it to legitimately proclaim to be "Makers of professional gaming gear." The Diamondback really is just that.

Although 'only' 1,600dpi (the Copperhead offers 2,000dpi if you must have higher), the precision in the movement of the Diamondback is excellent. It is also a light unit, and won't tire your hand or wrist even after hours of use. It has gold-plated USB connectors, and although we're certain that these are pure bling, it's nice bling for the hardcore.

Where the Razer unit is brilliant is for charging around weapon-filled maps railing your enemies with total accuracy. For day-to-day use, you do get accustomed to it, but it remains extremely twitchy in Windows unless you actually go in and turn the sensitivity

down in the control panel.

That done, however, it has all you need including

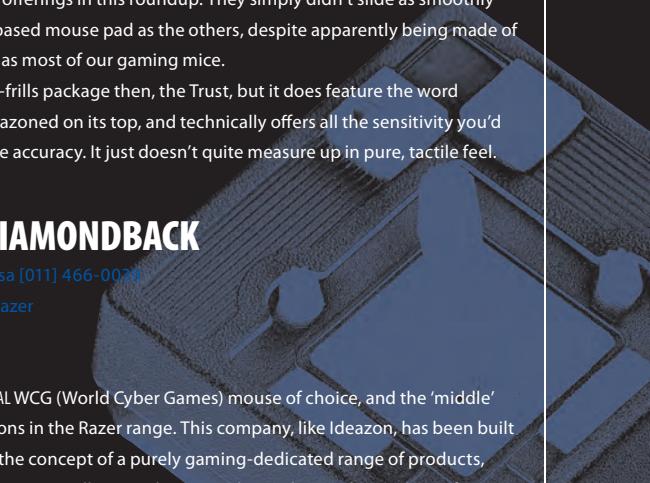
two thumb and two

pinkie buttons, mapped by default

to forward and back in

Windows, but programmable

through the Razer software, and a straightforward scroll-wheel.



LOGITECH G5 AND G7

SUPPLIER: Logitech SA [011]

656-3376

MANUFACTURER: Logitech

PRICE: G5: R599, G7: R849

YES, THE G IS for gaming, and these are the mid- and upper-range of this HID giant's products for the gaming segment, with the G3 covering the lower ground.

The G5 is a regular, wired laser-based mouse with a sensitivity of a monstrous 2,000dpi, switchable through 400dpi and 800dpi settings as well. It also features an adjustable weight-plate, to which you can attach up to 38g of weighting to optimise the feel of the unit in your hand. The feet are made of one of those crazily long substance names, polytetrafluoroethalene, which causes it to glide very nicely on any surface.

The G7 adds cordless functionality, but comes complete with two rechargeable lithium ion batteries and a USB-power charging station to eliminate the power headaches of 'normal' wireless mice. The slot for these batteries replaces the adjustable weight plate, but the G7 still has the adjustable dpi of course, and the Limited Edition version that we received also came with its own carry case and a gorgeous carbon fibre finish.

Both G5 and G7 are so pleasant to use, in any gaming or even office scenario, that it's easy to recommend both. The G7 is definitely the one to get if you're choosing between the two, as it looks so damn sexy and frees you from the USB cable. Even the regular G7 package, which doesn't feature the carbon-look material, is a more convenient proposition than the G5, and lacks only the weighting function, which we question the value of anyway. In actual pointer precision, both are identically adept and either would make an excellent gaming tool.

GENIUS ERGO 525

SUPPLIER: Axiz [011] 237-7000

MANUFACTURER: Genius

PRICE: R190

THIS GENIUS IS THE most conservatively styled of all the gaming mice, looking like a last-generation Microsoft mouse. It's big too, but comfortable in Windows. In the fingertip-precision gaming scenario, however, it's less comfortable.

There's the now-expected dpi configuration button, switching through 400dpi, 800dpi, 1,600dpi, and finally 2,000dpi. It's slightly flawed, however, as it includes no LEDs to tell you which of these four options it's currently set to.

It does sport a very precise tracking engine, however, and a four-way tilt-wheel, which really makes the Ergo a bit more of an office product than a hardcore gaming unit.

Of course, it does also depend a little on which FPS you're playing. The size of the Ergo makes it less than ideal for fast-twitch games like Q3A, but it does actually work quite well for more deliberate aiming games, like CS: Source



ZALMAN

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THE JOYSTICK

The conventional joystick idea is in fact the oldest of the input methods on test here, as its origins extend back beyond the introduction of the first PC. Their form and function, in the more specialised world of PC gaming, have evolved over the years, however, as more comfortable and intuitive general-purpose controllers have emerged, leaving the joystick to take up its role as the input device of choice specifically for flight game enthusiasts.

LOGITECH FORCE 3D

SUPPLIER: Pinnacle Micro [011] 265-3000

MANUFACTURER: Logitech

PRICE: R599

THIS LOGITECH CONTROLLER FEATURES bolder, more futuristic styling, based primarily on lots of angles and jutting edges, in stark contrast to the more flowing lines of its competition. It is also made of a subtly lower-grade plastic and the metal-look trigger and thumb buttons do nothing to convince you otherwise.

The Force 3D does provide a very pleasing force feedback effect however.

Based on the same Immersion engine that most modern FF devices use, there's little to distinguish it from the competition on this front, but nonetheless, you won't be at all disappointed despite the affordable price tag.

Logitech has employed a D-pad rather than a top hat however. It simply doesn't feel right to thumb a D-pad in the middle of a hectic dogfight, and is pretty tasteless from an aesthetics perspective. It also doesn't manage to support your hand that well. So unless you're sitting in the perfect position, it can actually start to get quite uncomfortable quite quickly.



THRUSTMASTER TOP GUN FOX 2 PRO AND FORCE FEEDBACK JOYSTICK

SUPPLIER: MobileG 084 245 5400

MANUFACTURER: Thrustmaster

PRICE: Fox 2: R340, Force Feedback: R850

THESE TWO ARE PRETTY much the same joystick, although the Top Gun-labelled offering lacks force feedback technology, which we found a bit peculiar.

We'd expected the company to have utilised its relationship with the US military on the full bells-and-whistles Halo model, rather than relegate the Top Gun offering to a lower-range unit and leaving the flagship unbranded.

That said, both of these units are well crafted from high-quality plastics, and feel durable and strong from the moment you start using them. Both feature the much-needed third control axis in the 'twisting' motion, and the Top Gun has seven programmable buttons and the top hat, while the Force Feedback model has eight, and both sport analogue throttle sliders. Interestingly, the Top Gun model will work on both PCs and Macs, while the Force Feedback technology restricts this offering to just the PC.

The actual feedback function itself is very nicely implemented, and once you've flown through a few missions of the demanding *Lock On: Modern Air Combat* with feedback, the non-powered joystick feels dead and numb in your hands. The FF effects are spot-on, and add a lot to the overall experience in our opinion, so we'd definitely go for this model. Aesthetically, and from a comfort perspective, both models are excellent, with all the major controls falling naturally to hand and comfortable enough for hours of gaming.

THE GAMEPAD

Since the birth of the console, the gamepad has been making a viable stab at the 'controller of choice' title, even in the PC gaming segment. To be honest, however, there are so many manufacturers out there making USB gamepads for the PC, that it's a very difficult market in which to differentiate one example from any others. That said, the Xbox 360 controller feels awesome, is good and modern, and works well, and apparently will work with a PC, which will change this space in the future.

XBOX 360 CONTROLLER

This next-gen console sports a fresh and innovative control design that feels great, with intuitively placed buttons and analogue inputs and a good comfortable grip no matter what position you happen to be in at the time. It works with a PC as well. The wired version uses USB and works right out the box, and the wireless version requires a converter, but can also be made to be compatible. With more and more console/PC gaming crossovers every day, you really need one of these on your PC to be sure you can play all the modern ported titles.

ASUS XITEPAD

This isn't really a retail product, but that's why we had to mention it. Asus might not be particularly well known for making input devices, but the XitePad suggests it should look at expanding its operations into this area.

The XitePad was part of the astonishingly generous bundle that the near-mythical X1800 XT TOP shipped with, and is easily the best PC gamepad we have tried.

It is incredibly solid, simple and easy to pick up and use, but also distinctive, and it's extremely comfortable for hours and hours of fun. Considering that this is not at all Asus's main focus, it's a superb effort and would move very well as a standalone product.



THRUSTMASTER HOTAS COUGAR

SUPPLIER: MobileG 084 245 5400

MANUFACTURER: Thrustmaster

PRICE: R3,345

THE HOTAS COUGAR HAS ruled the flight sim genre for some time now, and it's easy to see why. This joystick comes packaged in a box larger than the company's steering wheel products, as it's a two-piece unit featuring a separate throttle controller and flight yoke, using the same design as the real thing found in F-16 fighter jets.

The Cougar sports more buttons than you can shake a stick at – an astounding 26, in fact, scattered seemingly haphazardly around the place. Let your hands take their natural positions around the controllers, however, and each and every finger finds itself in range of at least two buttons, and using them all effectively is an exercise in digit dexterity almost as complex as guitar work.

The block 52 flight yoke is even removable for future upgrades to other flight stick designs from the company. Nothing has been left out in this USAF-branded, but not endorsed, flagship joystick.

It's the feel and quality of the Cougar that put it way out of even the most meticulously crafted competition in the gaming input market. After playing with a HOTAS Cougar, everything else just feels like a toy. A fair whack of the Cougar's high cost comes down to the fact that everything is made out of metal rather than cheap, but brittle plastic. This is a joystick that will never break, regardless of how rough you are with it in the heat of the moment, and that's reassuring.

There's no twist-axis on the HOTAS, because there are so many control axis available to be mapped to your rudder using the included Foxy Thrustmaster programming software as per your own personal preference. Moreover, the force feedback effects, which rumble through both of the cold metal surfaces under each of your hands, are perfectly judged to allow total immersion in the virtual skies.

There's no two ways about it; the HOTAS Cougar is unrivalled for good reason. It is, quite simply, the toughest, most physically pleasing, most functional, and most realistic PC flight sim controller you can buy - period.



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LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

LGG: MOTORAZR V3i

Supplied by: Motorola

Internet: www.motorola.co.za

RRP: R2,300 (R4,000 for the special edition - MOTORAZR V3i Dolce & Gabbana)

MOTOROLA HAS STRUCK GOLD with the V3 RAZR, a stylish clamshell phone that also manages to score marks on all the major elements: durability, battery life, features and interaction. Bolstered by the success of the range, the company decided that a new version was in order – hence the V3i. This special gold edition was designed especially for the phone's launch, but you can also get the V3i in silver and black.

See no evil

Like the V3, the V3i's screen measures at 176 x 220 pixels and can display 18-bit colour (or, specifically, 262,144 colours). It also has a smaller screen on the outside, measuring at 96 x 80 pixels and with 65,000 colours. This is handy in case you want to add custom images to people calling you, see the time at a glance or take a photo of yourself.

Touch no evil

One of the RAZR's biggest appeals is its etched keypad and navigation buttons. Not only do these feel nice under your fingers, but they are, quite unexpectedly, a lot easier to work with than what rival models offer. However, the big advantage comes in the clamshell design, allowing the RAZR a larger than usual key area. The navigation keys are straightforward, while the circular navigation buttons are very useful when playing games.

Store no evil

The V3i adds a few new features over the V3 design. Storage fans will be glad to hear that it now supports a microSD memory card that can be swapped while the phone is on. Likewise, the camera has now been upgraded into the megapixel range, while the onboard memory remains a rather low 12MB. One of the best features on the V3i is



the use of mini-USB instead of some proprietary plug. This means that connecting to the V3i via a PC just requires the software (supplied) and a standard USB/mini-USB cable. This port is also used to charge the phone and for headphones.

Fashion no evil

Dolce & Gabbana helped with fine-tuning the V3i's design, so consequently the company also released this gold model, which also comes in silver. The V3i still makes use of the excellent aircraft-grade aluminium and chemically-etched keypad, just in a new finish. For the image-obsessed, the special edition also ships with special wallpapers, themes and sounds based on D&G. The special edition also includes a music player, in which case you'd want to get that microSD card for storing songs.

Play no evil

But why feature the V3i? Is NAG trying to lead its readers down the avenue of the glitterati and other people who know their brands better than the names of their pets? No, the V3i has a lot of appeal because it's a solid platform for mobile gaming. There are phones better suited for playing games, but they aren't this well designed in terms of being an actual phone. The RAZR's small form factor is very attractive, while its robust Java support, responsive keys and vibrant screen, coupled with an onboard ATI chip, make for a nice platform to get some gaming done.

Evil accessories

Exclusive matching accessories for the MOTORAZR V3i Dolce & Gabbana are also available. These include a personalised Motorola H700 Bluetooth headset, a wired stereo headset for listening to MP3 music files and a luxury gold leather phone case.



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Multi-Median supports to see DVD movie and listen to Audio CD.
All DVD/AUDIO CD menu could be controlled by remote control.



DIGITAL CAMCORDER :
Multi-Median supports the DV Digital Camcorder which is connected through IEEE1394 port of PC. You can control digital camcorder by remote control.



SETTING :
User can change the background skin, assign media folders and devices, and set various options of Multi-Median.



MUSIC :
Multi-Median supports famous music file formats like MP3, OGG, WMA and WAV.
User can manage huge amount of music files according to its folder, album, artist and genre.



MOVIE :
Multi-Median supports famous video file formats like WMV, AVI(DivX and XviD), ASF, MPG, MPEG, M1V, M2V and DAT.



PHOTO :
Multi-Median supports every image files formats like BMP, GIF, JPG, TIFF and PNG.
User can enjoy the slideshow of image files with background music.



TV :
Multi-Median can show and record the TV channels. Multi-Median supports every kind of WDM TV card.

Chassis Overview



Built-in Media LAB Kit with Hot Keys Module (optional)



Accessible DVD Drive Bay



Dual 80mm Fans in the Side and Front

- Built-in Media LAB kit with hot keys module :
- 1. Media LAB Hoy Keys function
- 2. Media LAB application CD and remote control
- 3. Media LAB VFD panel
- Pithy aluminum front panel design



If you are using a Micro ATX motherboard, an optional upgrade kit A2423 is offered to easily install to your system. A2423 upgrade kit (optional): the kit contains PCI-E riser card and PCI riser card.



Multimedia Kit Application CD Language Support : English, Traditional Chinese, German, French, Japanese, Korean, ...12multi languages

OS Support : Windows 98, Windows Me, Windows 2000, Windows XP



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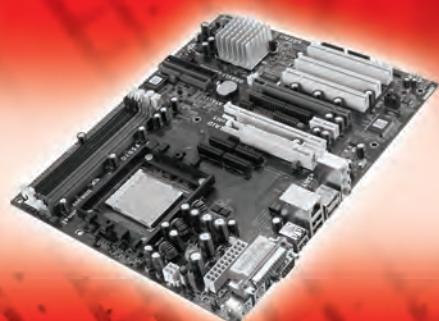
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rAge

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4TH RAGE EXPO LOCKED ON TARGET

**RAGE, THE ULTIMATE COMPUTER, GAMING AND TECHNOLOGY EXPO IS
LOCKED ON TARGET: THE COCA-COLA DOME IN NORTHGATE FROM THE
29TH OF SEPTEMBER TO THE 1ST OF OCTOBER 2006.**

2006 WILL SEE RAGE in its fourth year of showcasing the most popular and cutting-edge computer and videogames, technology, gadgets, and products, and the expo is set to be bigger, better and louder than ever before with even more exhibitors and the biggest ever LAN.

Gaming is one of the fastest growing sectors of the entertainment industry. After only thirty years in existence, global revenue for videogames (PC, Sony PlayStation, Game Boy etc.) is already around \$30 billion a year, and is expected to reach more than \$35 billion by 2007. Taking into account the fact that the film industry, which has been going for around 100 years, only has a global revenue 50% larger (at \$45 billion) than that of the videogame industry, predictions that by 2008 videogames will be the second most popular form of entertainment, having overtaken music, don't seem all that farfetched.

However, rAge isn't just about gaming. With products and technology on show, ranging from PC hardware components to networking equipment, from LCD monitors to MP3 players, and from comics and anime figurines to collectible card and board games, rAge is an expo for anyone who's into having fun in the 21st century.

The expo will highlight the latest in games and computer technology, and those who attend the expo range from both hardcore and professional gamers, to those on the lookout for the latest computer gadgets, to families just looking for a fun day out with an opportunity to get a little hands-on experience with the latest technology and gaming gadgets. Activities taking place during the weekend include giveaways of loads of prizes, celebrity appearances, PC gaming competitions, sneak peeks at some of the hottest gaming titles to be released in the upcoming months, and the South African launch of Microsoft's Xbox 360 gaming console.

With the exhibitors' space, which is bigger than ever before this year, close to being sold out, and the 1,200 seats up for grabs in the NAG LAN (tickets were sold out within a month of going on sale last year), making it the biggest LAN in South African history, rAge is a clear indication that the gaming and IT entertainment industry in South Africa is a force to be reckoned with. www.rageexpo.co.za

NAG LAN @ RAGE

This year, the NAG LAN @ rAge will be the largest ever in South Africa, with over 1,200 dedicated gamers all simultaneously connected to the same network for a weekend of awesome gaming. In the evenings, after the Arena 77 competitive area closes down, an additional 248 gamers will also connect to the LAN, bringing the total to 1,448.

Thanks to D-Link, the official network sponsor for the event, and Intel, the sponsor of the servers on which the games will run, the NAG LAN @ rAge will be the fastest and most gamer-friendly ever. In addition, for those who never do anything more energetic than clicking their mice, CTT Computers and Toshiba will be sponsoring 'porters' to carry gamers' equipment.

Besides testing your PC for power problems, as part of the NAG LAN PC Clinic, MicroWorld will set up a test area at the entrance of the LAN to scan all computers entering the LAN for viruses. You can find out more about them here www.mwti.net. However it's important to remember to still follow all the other rules for keeping your machine safe.

In addition to 53 hours of non-stop gaming and full access to the expo for the duration of the weekend, gamers in the NAG LAN will stand a chance to win R25,000 in an informal *Battlefield 2* competition (thanks to EA for sponsoring this).

Tickets to the NAG LAN cost R195.00 per person for the whole weekend and include free access to the expo. Bookings for the NAG LAN opened at Computicket on 1 August 2006.

GAME.DEV @ RAGE

The craziness that is the rAge Expo is poised to pounce on us at the end of this month. Game.Dev will be there in force again this year, helping, supporting and fostering local game development. Read on for a brief introduction to what is in store for all you game developers at rAge 2006.



The theme this year is growing game development into a viable industry in South Africa. This means that presentation topics will range from getting more beginners involved and empowered with game development systems, software and thinking, all the way through to the business of game development and how to make a living developing games.

This year's talks will be split up across the three days of rAge to allow for much needed geek-time. We know we can't compete with the latest and greatest shiny things on the show floor, but we have better personalities and can help you make your own shiny things. Each presentation session will consist of either a 45-minute workshop or two 25-minute talks, meaning they'll fit nicely into an hour, after which you can either head off to enjoy the expo, or stick around talking shop with the presenters and other attendees.

There is morning, post-lunch and afternoon sessions, but the best conversations and learning typically happen in the impromptu conversations inspired by the presentations. That has been the case at every Digital Gaming HotLab and DevLAN we've held so far. The experience from last year (and the other events we've run since) means that there will be posters with Game.Dev schedules and directions to the venue all over the place - no more hiding away for us. Game.Dev forum regulars will also be present on the show floor, handing out CDs and generally being the cool people they are, they'll talk your ear off about game development if given half a chance.

THE GAME DEVELOPER RESOURCE TOOLKIT

In partnership with I.T. Intellect (who will have a stand at the expo) and as many other sponsors as we can find, we'll be handing out a free CD filled to the brim with game development tools, resources, information and free indie games. As much local content as we can find will be on the CD, hopefully inspiring others to follow the same path.

LOCAL GAME DEVELOPER SHOWCASE

Speaking of local content, we'll be running local developer showcases throughout the expo. If you want to find out what's going on in the local scene, this is the place to be. The showcases themselves will be flexible, so if you're a local developer, hobbyist or dabbler, feel free to grab yourself a slot and show what you've made. There's a lot of talent in our country. It's a shame that so much of it goes unnoticed. So if you've developed something interesting or would like to find a project to work on, spend some time at the showcases.

GAME IDEA IDOLS

Last year we heard so many 'cool game ideas' that we just had to take it one step further. If you've got an idea that you reckon would be the next best thing since sliced bread, come and tell us in front of all the other hopefuls. Our panel of expert judges (no, really, they include everyone's favourite ranting Miktar and other people who are paid to develop or talk about games) will tell you if you're the next Will Wright or John Romero. Not only will you learn what parts of your design are good or bad, they'll also suggest ways that you could turn your dream game into reality. And who knows what type of people will be watching in the audience? You might land yourself a scholarship or something even better... We have had a local case where a demo made its way to E3 after being seen in the right circles!

THE BUSINESS OF GAMES

As we've mentioned, one of the core themes of this year's event is game development as a business. Finding ways to turn local games into profitable ventures is something that needs to be done to drive game development further in this country. We need a couple of success stories that people can relate to and be inspired by. Not only will some of the sessions focus on the business side of things, but we'll also be bringing business, local developers and young talent together, hopefully with explosive results.

DEV.MAG AT RAGE

Local community-run e-zine, Dev.Mag (<http://devmag.googlepages.com>), which you can find on this month's cover DVD, will be out in force at rAge this year. Following on their success at Scifest, they'll be taking contact details and trying to drum up as much awareness as possible. Dev.Mag's first and second in command, Stuart "Gonzo" Bothma and Rodain "Nandrew" Joubert, will be winging their way up to Gauteng especially for rAge. Every issue of the magazine so far will be available on the Game Developer Resource Toolkit CD. We hear there's something special planned for the 'rAge issue'.

GAME.DEV'S BIGGEST COMPETITION SO FAR

The wonderful folks at NAG have sponsored a truly unprecedented series of prizes for the August/September competition. This is the first time that Game.Dev has been able to give away prizes for the great games that are developed for the competition, and it's going to be a truly special occasion. The final judges' announcement of the winners and the prize giving will take place at rAge.

AND FINALLY, RAGE ITSELF

Don't forget that all this will be going on at the most exciting

WHO WILL BE EXHIBITING AT rAge

ATI	Intel
Boardgames	Learn 3D
Boston Media House	Look & Listen
BT Games	Matrix Warehouse
Computers Only	Megarom
Cosmic Comics	Microsoft Vista
CNA	Microsoft Xbox 360
City Varsity	MicroWorld
Comztek	MiDigital
CTT Computers	NAG Magazine
Custom PC SA	Naked IT
Digital Planet	SA Computer Magazine
Electronic Arts	Techsmart
Esquire Technologies	The Aviation Shop
Frontosa	The Citizen
Game.Dev	Venom Computer Systems
Gigabyte	

* This list was correct at the time of going to print

electronic entertainment expo in the country. rAge itself will always have something going on to amaze and dazzle attendees. This holds doubly true for game developers, who should find a surprising amount of local companies taking an interest in producing their own games, not to mention those brave souls amongst us who actually have our own development studios.

Among all the latest hardware and flashy case-mods, you'll also find homebrew development tools, more support companies than you can shake a stick at, and the ever-useful sound library CDs.

So if you're interested and would like to know more or are a possible presenter or local developer and want to become involved, head over to www.GamedotDev.co.za for the latest on what we'll be doing at rAge.

NAG LAN @ rAge

PART 1

SO, WE COVERED BASIC LAN etiquette in the July 2006 issue (see page 108). It might be a good idea to cover what you need in order to be prepared for an event of this nature. This topic has been covered with varied degrees of success on multiple sites, so I will try to highlight the most obvious aspects that you need to pay attention to.

We will have a huge amount of people from all over the country flock to the NAG LAN @ rAge. We cannot guarantee their intentions neither their proficiency when it comes to PCs. Because of this and because some people are blatantly ignorant, you can be 100% sure that there will be viruses. These will float around ignorant PCs eating into your bandwidth and causing a reinstall for the unwary. It is really not that difficult to stop just about all of the unwelcome attention that your PC will get.



The solution is a firewall combined with a good antivirus program. Firewalls do exactly what they say: they provide a protective barrier around your PC from unwelcome intrusion attempts. There are many different programs with varying degrees of success and ease of operation. Find yourself a trial version and see whether it works for you. You will most certainly be better off with a bad firewall than without one at all. Since all operating systems come with flaws in the design code, it would be advisable to patch these vulnerabilities as the very first step in protecting your PC. Windows 2000 has Service Pack 4 available, and Windows XP has Service Pack 2. Windows ME is not an operating system, and Linux Users should be clued up. Keep in mind that SP2 has been out for a long time and there are many vulnerabilities that have been addressed after SP2. Use Windows Update to get up to date.

Antivirus programs monitor the executing of code on your PC, and attempt to intercept malicious code before it delivers its payload. This might be some innocent spamming attempt utilising your connection or renaming or deleting system files. Because new viruses appear on a very regular basis, you need to update your virus pattern files regularly as well.

A common mistake people make is to leave 'File and Print Sharing' on. If you don't intend to share anything, leave this off. If you do need to share for any reason, make sure that your shares are read-only, and that you only share what you don't mind other people accessing. Be very wary of shares that you find on PCs. The secret Britney movie that you see might be a Trojan designed to give another PC access or complete control over your PC.

For those of you contemplating using ShareScan, PortScan or similar programs, or those irritating individuals trying to hack into PCs, be warned that you will leave the event, and will even be escorted out if necessary. Don't try to take what isn't meant for you. If you are unsure whether your software is a transgression of rAge rules, ask the VC staff.

Additional items that you may want to consider is to turn 'Remote Access' off, disable your 'Guest Account', rename your 'Administrator Account', use strong passwords consisting of both numerical and alphanumerical characters, not using simple file sharing, disabling wireless connections from both your PC and other devices such as cellphones, and having all your drivers and serial numbers available in case lady luck is no longer your friend. When at rAge and you see your

PART 2

SO, WE CAN ALMOST start counting down to rAge in days. The biggest gaming-related expo and LAN South Africa has ever seen are about to take you by storm. I will try to relate the most important info

rAge

reasons to go to rAge 06

It's bigger than ever before!

The Xbox 360 will be launching at rAge 2006

Retailers will be offering massive discounts

Behold the Mighty 1200 BYOC NAG LAN

Battlefield 2142 Playable Code at the EA stand as well as

Need for Speed: Carbon, FIFA 07 and Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07

D-Link Internet Cafe booths

Plenty playable code of games only coming in December and next year

Anime Cinema

You'll also get to see Call of Duty 3, Tony Hawk's Project 8, Neverwinter

Nights 2 and Test Drive Unlimited at the Megarom stand

Intel's rocket

Plenty of new hardware to blow your cash on

NAG Staff will be there to act high and mighty

Serious competitive events

Booth babes

Scarface, Timeshift, Joint Task Force and Caesar IV will be appearing at

the MIDigital stand

Plus much more as they say in most marketing bits



you still need, which wasn't covered in the previous two columns (one in this issue and the first one in the July 2006 issue), in a very short cryptic method.

The two most important rules are not to forget your ticket and to ensure that your plugs are the red type with the flattened earth pin.

There will be three main features, namely the rAge Exhibition, the Arena 77-run competitive event, and the NAG Open LAN hosted by VC. The exhibition details can be scrutinised at [www.rageexpo.co.za](http://rageexpo.co.za). The Arena 77 competition will be covered at www.arena77.com. Everything else, including the Open LAN, will be covered in the forums at www.nag.co.za.

Entrance to the Open LAN is not via the ramp as last year, but next to Entrance 1 below (see floor plan on one of the previous pages) the ramp entrance we have used in the previous two years. In the NAG LAN area, you can play at your leisure, bring your own computer and pretty much do your own thing. This is simply a LAN, much like any other, except that it is being held at rAge. It is hosted by NAG and run by VC, and consists of a massive 1,200 PCs, excluding any other competitive PCs. In the Open LAN, anything is played that doesn't cause a non-willing participant any harm.

rAge is from 29 September to 1 October. LAN doors open at 10:00 on Friday and close at 15:00 on Sunday. The entrance fee of R195 per person includes access to the expo. If your girlfriend, boyfriend, or friend just wants to see what the weekend is about, they need to buy a day pass (R30) or weekend pass at the expo. Regardless of whether gamers arrive on Friday or Sunday, the price will remain the same. Purchase your LAN ticket at Computicket and make sure that you fetch your ticket before the event - no ticket, no entry. IP addresses will be static, indicated by the sticker on your table. The parking area is opposite the entrance and is free if you have your ticket. Off-loading will be in the parking area and you might have gofers to help depending on when you arrive. A chill area is available, but no tents will be allowed. Please note that there are toilet facilities, but no bathroom facilities, i.e. showers, etc.

WHAT YOU NEED TO BRING:

Entrance ticket, PC, monitor, keyboard, mouse, headphones, power cord with red plug for PC and monitor, required software, drivers if something does go wrong, any medication you require (headache tablets might be a good idea just in case), something warm should it become cold, and money for sustenance.

WHAT NOT TO BRING:

No speakers, UPSs, multi-plugs, double adapters, switches, hubs, additional power-requiring devices such as fans, cellphone chargers, etc.

Only two PCs per supplied multi-plug are allowed. This doesn't mean you can plug something else in if you only use one plug, since the power is calculated according to PCs, not additional devices.

Make sure you don't plug in more than two PCs per multi-plug as you may become very unpopular if you cause the power to trip.

PCs will be tested at reception by powering them up to ensure that they don't cause failures. There will be a security system in place. Do not lose your identifying stickers given to you during registration at the event, otherwise your equipment will not be allowed to leave before the event has closed down. No major PC equipment (chassis and monitor) will be allowed to enter or exit after 22:00. Hacking and port scanning will not be taken kindly and you will be asked to leave, escorted if required. A server for downloading required patches and other relevant information will be hosted at the LAN.

Food and drinks will be for sale inside the venue. No take-away food and cooler boxes may be brought into the venue. No alcohol will be allowed inside the venue. The most popular servers at the moment will be hosted. The VC crew will be able to assist you in getting up and running, so newbies are welcome. Just ensure that you have the requirements covered. No bad attitude will be tolerated. Behave in a way that will make your mom proud and is fitting for a public event without age restriction.

There will be 24-hour monitored security at the venue, and all gamers will be required to sign their PCs and equipment in upon entry into the venue. Once you leave, you will sign your equipment back out again. Whilst adequate measures will be taken by the organisers to ensure the safety of your equipment, please note that no responsibility will be accepted by the organisers should people fail to follow the procedures as set out.

Please take your keyboard, mouse and headphones with you when you leaving the Dome for whatever reason. Never leave your valuables such as cellphones, wallets, MP3 players, etc. unattended. This will most certainly lead to temptation that is not needed. Please ensure that your PC has the latest service packs installed (SP4 for Win2000 and SP2 for XP). Please ensure that you have some antivirus software installed on your PC. A free antivirus program will be available from the VC crew if you cannot access one prior to the event. Please ensure that the virus pattern file is up to date.

The Dome is a non-smoking area. No smoking will be permitted inside the venue. Neither NAG, Arena 77, nor VC will make sleeping arrangements for anybody attending rAge. This is your own responsibility.

Now it's just a couple more nights' shuteye and we will have lift-off.

Cee Ye Soon

ShadowOrphan

VC

High-Speed Data Transfer with Improved Accessibility and Reliable Performance

Innovative ASUS QuieTrack Optical Drive with Auto Vibration Reducing System (AVRS) Helps to Expand Multimedia Enjoyment

Multimedia and entertainment applications have become almost a daily routine in this age of digital living. Unfortunately the primary means of digital contents are still being played back through disc drives, where motors become the main source of noise inevitably. With disc rotation speeds in the latest optical drives reaching up to 66m/s, it is almost comparable to a 240km/s hurricane. The fast airflow coupled with motor vibration unfortunately helped to raise operation acoustics up to 50db in most drives. It could get very annoying when you are trying to concentrate on work or listen to some tunes.

The innovative AVRS, one crucial element of the three-part **QuieTrack** technology ensemble from the leading provider of high-performance optical drives - ASUS, is developed exactly with that in mind to dampen drive noise in every conceivable fashion while improves on stability, accessibility, and playability.

So just what exactly is AVRS?

With rotating machinery as one of the most frequent causes of vibration, AVRS (Auto Vibration Reducing System) can successfully reduce vibration and noise induced by unbalanced mass during rotations. Active ball-balancing is a method employed to adjust the state of the rotor and compensate changes that might have occurred. Balls run freely at the transient state and will automatically move to the opposite position when mass becomes unbalanced. AVRS effectively reduces the vibration caused by the unbalanced disc and most importantly enhances readability and playability.



AVRS reduces of unbalanced discs lower noise and enhance readability and playability



Additionally, the QuieTrack technology is not complete without two other essential features:

Airflow Field Modification (AFFM):

Noise and vibration are two major headaches users encounter when using a high-speed drive. AFFM is designed to change the uneven airflow field inside the drive. Furthermore, the four unique oval grooves on the upper case reinforce the structural integrity as well as modifying the internal aerodynamics of the turbulent airflow. The overall effect of balanced pressure distribution leads to quieter and more stable operation.

Double Dynamic Suspension System II (DDSSII):

The cutting-edge technology is designed to minimize vibration caused by spindle motors, components and PC cases. The patented DDSSII stabilize the pick-up head, both horizontally and vertically, achieving more precise tracking while reducing vibration and noise caused by high-revolution motors.

Incorporating such breakthrough features, enter the latest QuieTrack optical drive offering from ASUS. Aptly named, the QuieTrack Series provides a quiet and distraction-free environment. In recent industry reviews by hardware testing websites, noise produced from one competitor DVD-ROM out vocalizes 4 ASUS DVD-ROM, once again proving the effectiveness of QuieTrack.

Combined with high speed digital audio extraction and CD-audio playback, fast 52X CD and 16X DVD read features, along with the convenience of horizontal and vertical mounting capability, the DVD-E616A2 of the QuieTrack Series delivers superior flexibility and reliable operation that will certainly put all the quibbles to rest.

Expand your multimedia universe with unmatched playback compatibility

Employing the innovative QuieTrack technology, the ASUS DVD-E616A2 offers leading-edge multimedia experience with fabulous playback capacities and high-speed data transfer. Built-in advanced technologies provide users of the DVD-E616A2 a quiet, stable and high-performance multimedia environment.

Benefiting from the stability of AVRS, the DVD-E616A2 is capable of fast data transfer speed of 16x DVD and 52x CD-ROM, allowing users to access all CDs, DVD-R/ RW/ ROM, DVD+RW and DVD-Video, DVD-RAM without any compatibility issues.

Apart from the QuieTrack design ingenuity, every component of DVD-E616A2 DVD-ROM drives is selected with providing peace and quiet in mind. With the ASUS DVD-E616A2 DVD-ROM drive featuring AVRS, multimedia universe could finally be expanded to bring about more digital enjoyment.



RAGE 2006: THE COMPETITIVE ANGLE

There have been a few changes to the rAge tournament roster since the official announcement last month. Core Impact, the existing owners of the WCG licence in South Africa have pulled the plug on the SA leg of the WCG series as a result of a lack of funds. Here is what Len Nery from Arena 77 had to say, "It is unfortunate and sad that this has happened, but totally out of our control. Arena 77 is contracted by Core Impact to manage the series and has no say in the financial running of WCG. We have however bumped up the rAge CS: Source competition max entry level to accommodate the teams that had entered the WCG event. For those gamers out there that feel they want to throw rotten eggs my way... You are wasting your energy, this is truly not our fault as we are merely puppets on Core Impact strings in a WCG theatre and I am embarrassed enough. However, this is not the case with regards to Kode5 and ESWC because we own those licences and will never pull the plug two months prior to an event..."

Arena 77 director Len "Fr33" Nery has, however, confirmed that there will still be a Need for Speed competition at rAge, where the fastest drivers for each day will receive a prize. An entirely new addition to the tournament line-up is the Battlefield 2 competition, which will be held at the NAG LAN and organised by the Vaalhooligan Crew.

The following is a general summary of the competitive offerings at this year's rAge – all the tournaments, all the tariffs, all the time!

QUAKE 4

- Event: Telkom sponsored competition at rAge
 - Date: Saturday 30 September to Sunday 1 October
 - Eligibility: 32 registered players
 - Entrance Fee: R195 (players will receive a R75 refund at the event)
 - Booking Through: www.arena77.com
 - Payment: Computicket outlets countrywide. Once you have purchased your ticket, fax a copy (clearly showing ticket number and nickname) to 086 500 8234 and await confirmation on the Website

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

- Event: Telkom sponsored competition at rAge
 - Date: Saturday 30 September to Sunday 1 October
 - Eligibility: Open to all at the expo
 - Entrance Fee: Free
 - Bring Your Own Computer: No
 - Access to the NAG LAN: No

- Bring Your Own Computer: No, you will be playing on sponsored PCs (onboard sound), but you may bring your own keyboard and mouse
 - Access to the NAG LAN: No

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

- Event: Annual rAge competition
 - Date: Saturday 30 September – Sunday 1 October
 - Eligibility: Eligibility: 48 registered teams
 - Entrance Fee: R975 per team
 - Booking Through: www.arena77.com
 - Payment: Computicket outlets countrywide. Once your team has purchased its tickets, fax a copy of all five (clearly showing ticket numbers and team name) to 086 500 8234 and await confirmation on the Website
 - Bring Your Own Computer: Yes
 - Access to the NAG LAN: Yes

DEFENSE OF THE ANCIENTS (DOTA)

- Event: ATI Sapphire sponsored competition at rAge
 - Date: Saturday 30 September to Sunday 1 October
 - Eligibility: 32 registered teams
 - Entrance Fee: R600 per team
 - Booking Through: www.arena77.com
 - Payment: Weekend pass at rAge R50 and then R70 at the ATI stand to compete
 - Bring Your Own Computer: No
 - Access to the NAG LAN: No

BATTLEFIELD 2

- Event: NAG LAN tournament, sponsored by Electronic Arts South Africa
 - Date: Saturday 30 September to Sunday 1 October
 - Eligibility: Open to anyone in the NAG LAN
 - Entrance Fee: R195 (You need to purchase a NAG LAN ticket to be eligible to enter this competition)
 - Booking Through: www.computicket.co.za
 - Payment: Computicket outlets countrywide
 - Bring Your Own Computer: Yes
 - Access to the NAG LAN: Yes



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WSVG KICKS OFF WORLD SERIES

www.thewsvg.com

AS ANNOUNCED EARLIER THIS year, the World Series of Video Games (WSVG) has decided to adopt a different approach to e-sports tournaments. Instead of simply creating their own branded events (such as the Cyberathlete Professional League and the World Cyber Games), they have acquired the rights to existing major tournaments across the world, using these as qualifiers for their end-of-season grand final. The first three events on the WSVG calendar took place in the last two months – Lanwar (Kentucky, USA), Dreamhack (Jonkoping, Sweden), and the Intel Summer Championship (Texas, USA).

With both Lanwar and Dreamhack being held on the same weekend, the competitive field was separated into the European and North American contingents. Notable exceptions were Allesandro "Stermy" Avallone (Italy) and Ivo "Forever" Lindhout (Netherlands), who entered the Lanwar Quake 4 tournament in order to avoid the more difficult competition at Dreamhack. The decision proved worthwhile for Stermy, who ultimately finished in first place. Just behind him was American newcomer Rafik "Lost-Cause" Bryant, an instant favourite with spectators due to his modest attitude and dry humour about his African-American heritage. Coming as a surprise to some, CPL World Tour 2005 champion Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel only managed fourth place. Some critics blame this low finish on his six-month sabbatical from competitive gaming, but Fatal1ty is famous for peaking at the right moment, and other critics pointed out that he began his illustrious *Painkiller* career in much the same fashion. The Counter-Strike tournament featured all-American teams, and was won in two quick sets by Team 3D, after a shock loss to Pandemic forced them into the lower bracket. Thanks to this surprise victory, Pandemic finished as the runners-up, ahead of the more celebrated Complexity Syndicate who took third.

Meanwhile, at Dreamhack, Anton "Cooler" Singov



(Russia) was showing the world why he is regarded as the best Quake 4 player. He dispatched of Sweden's Johan "Toxic" Quick in a relatively comfortable final, claiming the cheque for \$5,000. In the Counter-Strike tournament, it was all Sweden, whose two flagship teams, Ninjas in Pyjamas and Fnatic, finished first and second respectively.

Two weeks later, with the Electronic Sports World Cup finals only just completed, the Intel Summer Championship opened its doors at the Gaylord Texan Resort. (Yes, we find the name amusing too.) With the overall Quake 4 points leader, Cooler, unable to arrange a VISA for entry into the United States, the path was clear for Toxic to claim his first international title. However, it wasn't to be an easy one. Toxic entered the grand final from the lower bracket, having lost 2-1 to fellow Swede Alexander "Ztrider" Ingvar (of *Painkiller* fame) in the upper bracket semi-final. After Stermy knocked Ztrider to the lower bracket, the two Swedes met again in the lower final, where Toxic won 2-1 in a reversal of their previous match. The grand final saw the Lanwar winner up against the Dreamhack runner-up, and Toxic made it pretty clear which had been the more difficult event. He demolished Stermy 4-0, each map by a difference of over ten frags. With a \$20,000 winner's cheque, this makes Toxic the highest earning Quake 4 player to date. Fatal1ty, showing his consistent

improvement, finished fourth again in what was a considerably more challenging tournament than Lanwar. He was the most successful American.

Finally, the Counter-Strike tournament was won by Complexity, who also came into the grand final from the lower bracket. After avenging themselves in the lower final against Fnatic (who knocked them out of the Electronic Sports World Cup), they went on to face the Germans from Alternate Attax. Complexity won 16-7 on *de_inferno* and 16-10 on *de_dust2*, netting them \$40,000, and making them the highest earning Counter-Strike team in 2006.

QUAKE 4 QUALIFIED PLAYERS

1. Allesandro "Stermy" Avallone (Italy)
2. Rafik "Lost-Cause" Bryant (USA)
3. Anton "Cooler" Singov (Russia)
4. Johan "Toxic" Quick (Sweden)
5. Alexander "Ztrider" Ingvar (Sweden)
6. Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel (USA)

COUNTER-STRIKE QUALIFIED TEAMS

1. Team 3D (USA)
2. Pandemic (USA)
3. Ninjas in Pyjamas (Sweden)
4. Fnatic (Sweden)
5. Complexity (USA)
6. Alternate Attax (Germany)

CPL SELECTS QUAKE III FOR 2006 WORLD SEASON

www.thecpl.com

IN A BOLD SHOW of acquiescence to community demands, the Cyberathlete Professional League has decided to use *Quake III* in their tournaments for the remainder of 2006. The decision was made in light of overwhelming support of *Quake III* amongst the CPL staff (90% of votes), strategic partners (90%), 1v1 player committee (85%), and the public (80%). This follows the trend set by the popularity of *Counter-Strike 1.6* and *StarCraft: Broodwar*, both also seven-year-old games which

are still featured as main events across the world. It is interesting to note that the other major tournament organisations have opted to remain with *Quake 4*.

The announcement of *Quake III* comes only a month after the CPL's re-emergence into the competitive scene. They were previously forced to cancel their 2006 World Tour after losing their title sponsor, Intel, to the World Series of Video Games, but soon afterwards announced a partnership with rival processor

manufacturer AMD. Along with the signing of the new sponsor, the CPL also announced strategic partnerships with organisations in China, South Korea, Singapore, Brazil, Chile, Australia, Italy, and Scandinavia. Dubbing the string of events the "World Season", the CPL has effectively reinstated their World Tour concept, albeit with decreased prize money. Each event will function as a qualifier, with the grand finals being held at the CPL's Winter Championship at the end of the year.

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- Database: MySQL or Postgres
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- Disk Space: 10 MB
- Database: MS Sql / Access / MySQL
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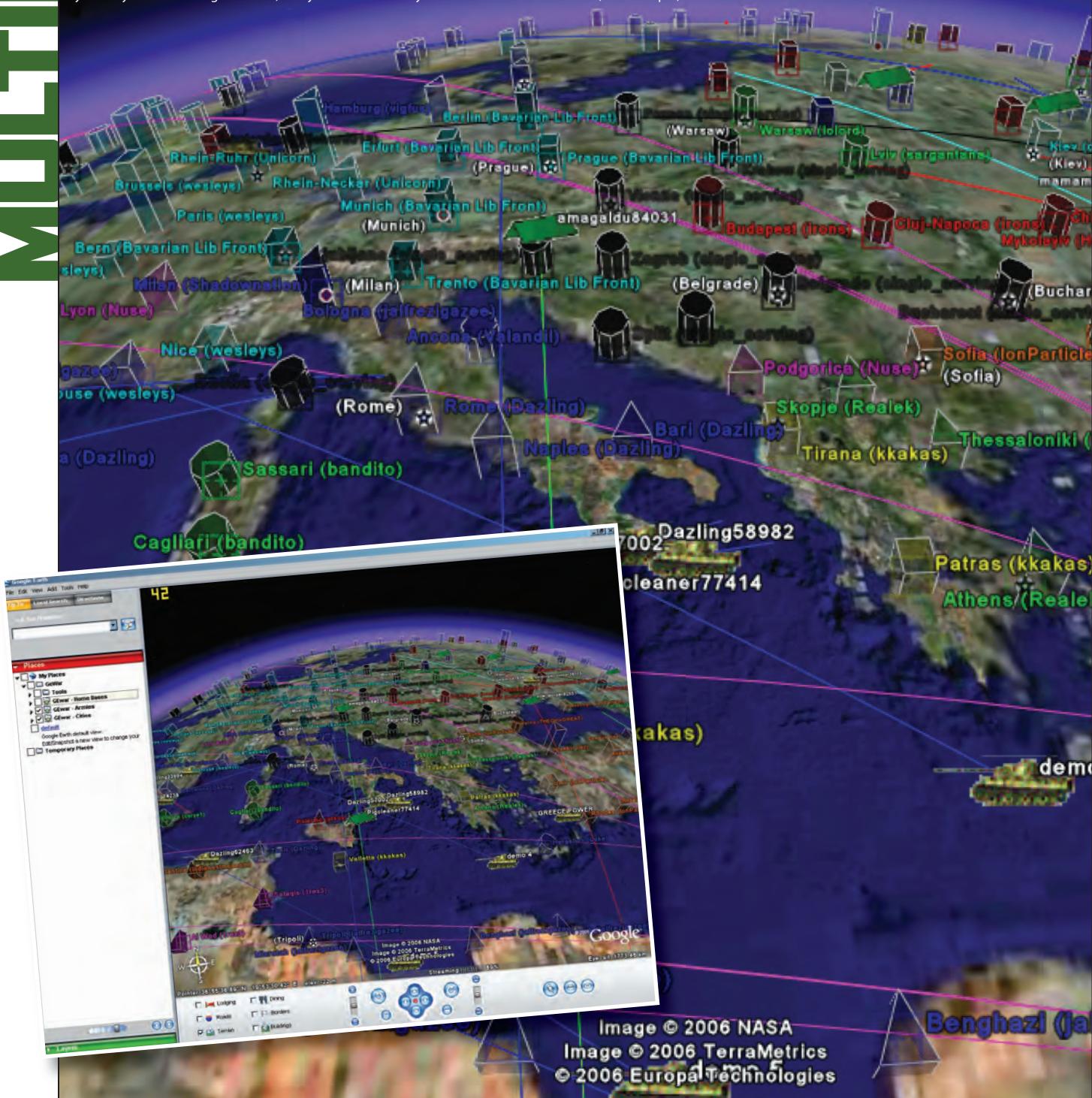
GEWAR IS A VERY loose implementation of *Risk*, using Google Earth as an interface. Found at www.gewar.net, the game runs on a server while you 'play'. You download some .kmz files that show you where everyone is, where the cities are that you can attack/capture, as well as the positions of armies – all in real-time, on Google Earth. The game is free to play and easy to get into, once you understand how the game works with Google Earth. On the Website, you tell your armies to go to cities, and you check

to see if anyone has taken those cities on Google Earth. It is very much like other online games such as *Promiscance*, just with much more visual feedback.

By building oil fields, diamond mines and cotton fields (in the right countries, of course), you slowly get resources. The game is real-time in many ways, in that sending an army from one point to another takes into account the distance and then assigns a 'realistic' speed to travelling that distance. Sending your fleet from Africa to the US, for example, can take

up to a week, in real-time. Thankfully the Website helps you keep track of what your armies are doing, as well as showing you early warnings if your cities are about to be attacked (which could mean in a few days or so).

While GeWar is still very early in development, it is already quite popular. At any given time there are over 300 people playing, all jostling to take cities. Forming alliances has its benefits. There is safety in numbers, and nowhere is that more true than in GeWar. **NAG**



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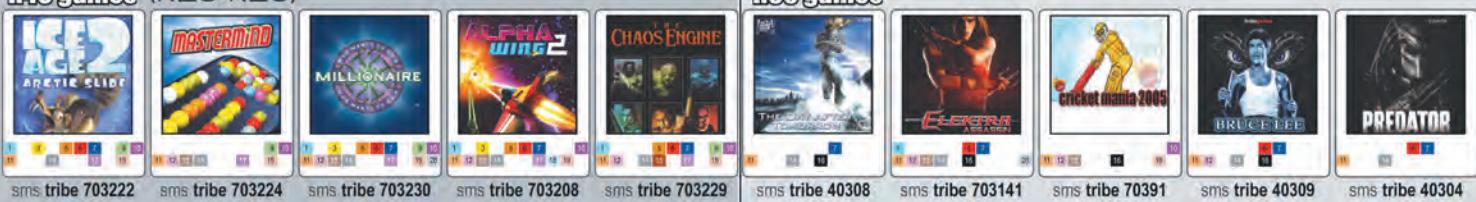
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R20 games



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PUZZLE PIRATES

Web: www.puzzlepirates.com

Developer: Three Rings

Publisher: Three Rings

Retail price: Free

Monthly: \$9.99

THREE AS A genre is actually very diverse. While the popular image of a massively online game involves swords and sorcery, with players running around beating up monsters in the world and completing quests, the larger image reveals a whole range of games to play. Most follow the traditional formula fairly closely, alternating the theme, while others engage in much more diverse concepts. These are often much more niche than the popular offerings, but they prosper nonetheless. That's mainly because they bring something new to players.

Puzzle Pirates launched its first server at the end of 2003 and has grown steadily, gathering a following of dedicated players who like the alternative approach to playing the game. The game features all the stalwart features of an MMO. Players assume the role of a pirate and then set about to up their status in the world, essentially by collecting cash for things done. These include making items and weapons to sell to the world, taking part in drinking or sword fighting events, or sailing the high seas, plundering ships that cross your way.

The difference is that everything in the game

is resolved through a mini-puzzle. Sword fighting is similar to *Puzzle Fighter* – players have to drop similarly coloured blocks into groups and then remove them with a Sword block. The more blocks removed in a single strike equate to the strength of attack (or lump of blocks dropped) on your opponent. In *Puzzle Pirates*, these battles can be two-on-two or involve entire crews. Likewise, sailing, navigating, bailing water, and carpentry are specific puzzle games. The better you are at these, the higher your level and reputation grows in the specific puzzle.

Players can make money working on crews, but when the seas are quiet or one tires of the work on a deck, saloons offer opportunities to play parlour games such as Hearts, Drinking, Treasure Drop and more. Impromptu games can also take place between any two players who meet up. The real appeal here is that one can gamble on the outcome of a game – many *Puzzle Pirates* players have made a lucrative in-game existence gambling.

All this cash goes towards clothes, houses, ships and other items of esteem. You can eventually get your own ship and go pillaging or ship goods

between islands for good profits (but you risk being raided by pirates). The game comes in two flavours: subscription servers charge \$9.95 a month to be able to buy items; while Doubloon servers let players buy game currency with real currency (the site sold its five millionth doubloon just over a year after the server was launched). The most appealing part of *Puzzle Pirates* is its quick-play dynamic. It's quite easy to go into the world and spend only an hour there making cash and doing some pillaging. The loot system is very fair, though the ultimate split decision lies with the captain of the ship. Likewise, chatting to other players and doing transactions are very easy.

Puzzle Pirates also retails as a boxed copy in the US, but a free edition can be downloaded from the official site, and will work on any platform with Java installed. It offers a month's free play in the game world. The world is very family-friendly and the cuter graphics and puzzle dynamic attract many non-traditional MMO players. It's never as epic as *Guild Wars* or *World of Warcraft*, but that's not the point. If you ever find yourself hopelessly addicted to the simplest of puzzle games, you'll find a lot of value in *Puzzle Pirates*. **NAG**



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POPULATING THE FIELD

PREVIOUSLY, WE COVERED THE THEORY BEHIND GOOD PUZZLE CONSTRUCTION AND APPLIED THAT THEORY TO THE PARTICULAR TYPES OF GAME DESIGN PROBLEMS WE HAVE IN GOLEM MASTER. IT IS NOW TIME TO START MAKING THE GAME MORE COMPLEX SO THAT WE CAN START PUTTING TOGETHER SOME INTERESTING PUZZLES.

ADDING NEW PIECES

THE GAME, AS IT currently stands, is a tad sparse. To really stretch our legs and give the player more rewarding challenges, we're going to need to add more puzzle pieces that we can use to obstruct, help or reward the player. There are two types of objects that we can add: new obstacles that affect the golem, and new tiles that the player can use. However, before we explore new ideas, we need to do a little...

DEBUGGING

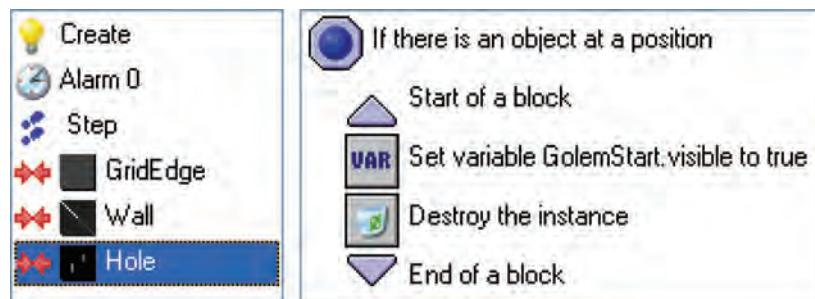
Any game will start generating bugs once it hits a certain size, and Golem Master is no different. During a quick play testing session, we discovered that sometimes the game had the annoying habit of picking up a tile and sliding a new one into the same position in very quick succession. This is caused by the way that TileSelector and FloorSelector trigger their sliding logic using *Mouse->Left Button*: If the left mouse button was held down on the same spot that a new FloorSelector object was created on (see the Selection state-machine system), the FloorSelector would trigger instantly. Simply right clicking on the *Mouse->Left Button* events and changing them to *Mouse->Left Released* events in TileSelector and FloorSelector squashes our bug rather neatly. The 'GolemMaster_006.gm6' file on the cover DVD already has this fix in place.

Debugging is an art form in its own right, especially game debugging, because it typically deals with program code that's being executed a couple of hundred times per second, instead of 'normal' programs that only run code when the user does something. Bugs fall into three categories: programming bugs such as typos or incorrect variable names (these are generally picked up by compilers these days before a program actually runs); hardware bugs that happen in specific circumstances and cause the program to crash in unexpected ways; and logic bugs, where the program compiles and runs perfectly but doesn't do what you want it to be doing... This time around, we had a simple logic bug: *Mouse->Left Button* re-triggers every frame when the left button on the mouse is held down, which means it was a bad choice for what we wanted to happen.

Logic bugs can be the worst type of bug if they're hidden away inside a huge system and aren't immediately obvious from examining the symptoms... Anyway, on with adding the new objects!

THE IDEAS:

Before you read beyond this paragraph, take some time to sit down and have yourself a mini-design brainstorm. Keeping the gameplay of Golem Master in mind, what new objects can you come up with to add to the game? Write them down along with a brief explanation of what effects they'll have in the



game. When you're done, see how many are mirrored in the list below. Feel free to send your ideas for great pieces that aren't on our list to the magazine...

NEW OBJECTS:

Hole – A hole in the floor that the Golem can fall into unless it's covered by any tile. If the Golem falls into the hole, the level needs to be restarted.

Ooze – Muck on the floor that stops any tile that slides over it. Can be used in place of walls to stop tiles. Could there be different colours of ooze that behave differently? Green ooze can allow a tile to be picked up again, blue ooze holds onto the tile forever, etc. The Golem walks slower as it passes through ooze.

Rune – Runes are special marks on the floor that the Golem obeys as though they were tiles. A rune will change the Golem's direction as it walks over it, unless the rune is covered by a tile.

This list is in no way comprehensive; it's limited by what we can reasonably cover this month. Hopefully your lists are much, much longer.

DIGGING HOLES

To make the Hole object, simply right click on the Floor object and select duplicate. Now change the object's name to 'Hole' and set its parent to Floor. Create a new temporary sprite (without precise collision checking or transparency) for it that indicates a hole in the map, and we're done with the Hole object itself. We still need to make the Golem react to it though. Open up Golem and give it a new *collision event* with Hole. To make the Golem only die if the Hole isn't in contact with a Tile, we use an *If an object is at position* action from the Control tab. Set its object type to Tile, x to other.x, y to other.y and check Not (we only want this to happen if there's no Tile there, remember?). Start a new block, set the value of GolemStart.visible to true, drag in a *destroy the instance* action and close the block. Holes should now work perfectly. [See image 1]

Image 1: Getting holes working



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ENGINEERING OOZE

To create Ooze, *duplicate Floor* again. This time rename the new object to 'Ooze', but still set its parent to Floor. We still want Tiles

```
//Check to see if there's a Tile touching this Ooze:
stuckTile = instance_position(x, y, Tile);
if (stuckTile > 0) {
    //Check to see if the tile is in the same place as this oozie
    //We can only stop the tile if it's moving
    if ((stuckTile.x == x) and (stuckTile.y == y) and (stuckTile.speed > 0)) {
        //Stop the tile moving
        stuckTile.speed = 0;
        //and set the selection state machine working again
        instance_create(0, 0, Selector);
    }
}
```

Image 2: GML to make Ooze sticky

to be able to be slid onto this spot. Create a suitably oozy-looking 32 by 32 sprite for it to use. The logic behind Ooze is that every step it needs to check if a Tile is directly above it. If it finds one, it simply stops it moving and resets the selection system. Stick an *execute a piece of code* action in Ooze's Step event and type in the GML script in Figure 2. [See **image 2**]

Note how we use a variable to store the object that *instance_position()* returns. If that variable was 0 or -1, *instance_position()* couldn't find an object of the right type, so we can't do anything to it. If the variable is larger than 0, it points to an object that we can do things to. This is a very useful technique in GM, especially when you want slightly more complex behaviours.

CARVING RUNES

The hardest part about creating what we want for runes is that we're pretty much duplicating the Tile system. If you take a look in the Golem's *step* event, you'll see that's quite a lot of code... except we're not going to duplicate it! If we combine the 'pointer to object' trick from the Ooze with another nifty trick and a bit of parenting, we'll only need to add a tiny bit of code to the Golem, plus a little on each different Rune.

First, create a new object that we'll use as a parent for all the different types of runes. Call it 'Rune' and set its parent as Floor so that we don't break Tile sliding. Go ahead and create a new group to store the rune objects in - we'll need it. Set Rune's depth to 50 and add a new event, one that's slightly difficult to find: *Other->User Defined->User 0*. This event is part of the second trick. We'll use it to store code that will change the Golem's direction on the individual runes. GM won't keep an empty event, so place a comment there for now.

Open up the Golem's *step* event (if you haven't already) and insert a new *execute a piece of code* action right at the bottom, before the end of the block that contains all the Tile recognition code. Fill it with the code in Figure 3. [See **image 3**]

Recognise the first trick? The second trick is the part that says "*event_perform_object(onRune.object_index, ev_other, ev_user0);*" What it does is run the actions in the *Other->User Defined->User 0* event on the object that *onRune* points to, as though that code were part of the Golem. With this, we can now create all our runes quickly and easily. The basic logic is that each rune will specify the Golem's new direction in its *User 0* event, while the Golem actually runs that code thanks to *event_perform_object()*. Many other events can be triggered in this way. [See **image 4**]

To create the rune that changes our Golem's direction to 'up' (just like the tile that does the same thing), duplicate the Rune object and save the duplicate as RuneUp. Change its parent to

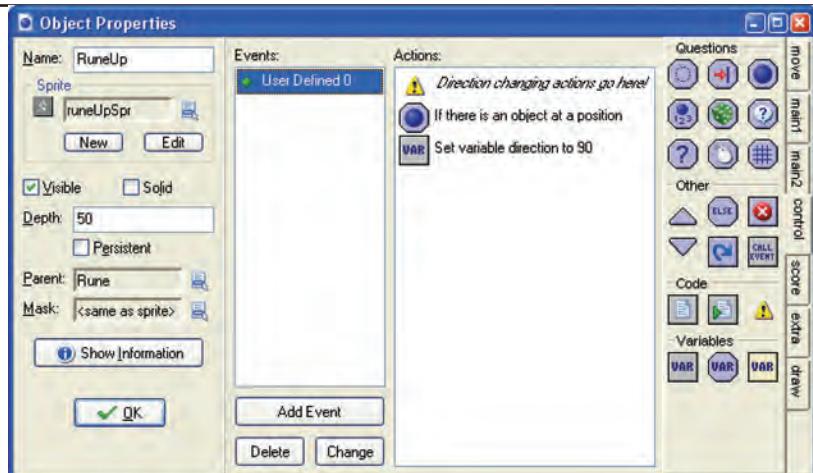


Image 3: The RuneUp object

```
//See if there's a Rune in the same position as the golem:
onRune = instance_position(x, y, Rune);
if (onRune > 0) {
    //Run the rune's User 0 event as though it were on the golem!
    event_perform_object(onRune.object_index, ev_other, ev_user0);
}
```

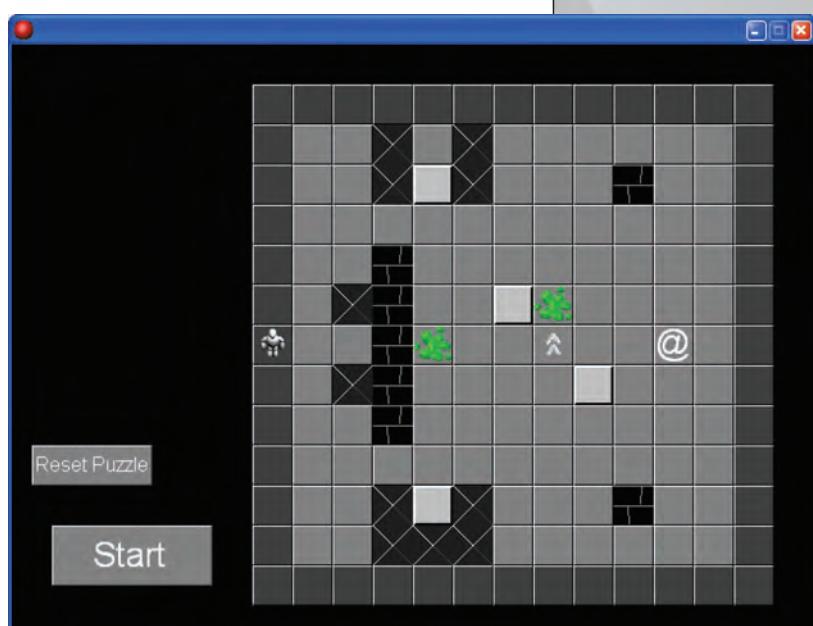
Rune and give it a sprite that resembles the sprite for TileUp, but is based on the Floor sprite instead of Tile's sprite. Our trick comes in when we add an action in RuneUp's *Other->User Defined->User 0* event and set the value of direction to 90, exactly like we do in the Golem's code for detecting Tiles. We only want the Golem to change direction if there are no tiles covering the rune. Place an *if there is not an object of type Tile at 0, 0 (relative)* action above the direction change to allow runes to be covered. That's it. Place RuneUp in the Golem's path as a floor object and test it out.

Create runes for the other three cardinal directions (left, right, down) as well as clockwise and counter clockwise rotation, using the corresponding direction settings for each one: Left = 0, right = 180, down = 270, clockwise = -90 relative, counter clockwise = +90 relative. Remember, all you need to change are the sprites and the *User 0* actions. You don't have to touch anything in Golem at all!

Next month, we'll add a few more pieces, hopefully ones inspired by reader suggestions. **NAG**

Image 4: The RuneUp object

Puzzle containing holes and ooze, can you solve it?



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LIFESTYLE





INTO THE PIXEL 2006

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WITH THE CHANGES TO E3, moving it back towards an industry-focused event, it remains to be seen if the lack of flash and noise still provides the right platform for 'Into The Pixel', the annual game art exhibition that has grown to become a benchmark for game artwork seen these days. While a game is developed, dozens, if not hundreds, of detailed pieces of art are created to illustrate a concept or create a certain mood and feel. Sometimes the art is for the cover or an interesting aspect of the game itself. Nevertheless, during the development cycle some truly stunning pieces are created, and often overlooked soon after. In the creatively fertile ground of game development, art gets used a lot and discarded just as easily.

The Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences decided to change this, and in 2004 started taking submissions for the first exhibition, to be held at E3. The show was a success, even though some attendees couldn't figure out why a bunch of game art was hanging in one of the convention centre's foyers. However, they looked good and that's all that mattered.

Two years later, and the show took place for a third time. That year the academy received over 150 entries from countries including the US, UK, Japan, Poland, Germany and France. However, the final choices were made and sixteen pieces were on display at the event.

Perhaps one of the more fascinating sides to the exhibition is that many of the artists didn't use traditional media, instead preferring one or multiple digital art disciplines. Some pieces were also the work of single artists, while others were created by a team. Another striking point the exhibition makes year after year is how much concept and design art can differ from project to project. Most show locations or characters, but some go for something more epic, such as Eduardo Gonzalez's *Titan's Head* from *God of War*. There's the more abstract as well, such as the bizarre collage called *Eyes for Evidence - The Last Ritual* or the definitive style of the *Metal Gear Solid* series seen in *In the Garden of Eva* for *Metal Gear Solid 3*. One particularly different yet familiar work has to be *Screen_000027*, an abstract wireframe render from *Project Gotham Racing 3* that gives a real sense of motion.

Perhaps it's best to end off with the impressions of Ryan Church, a Senior Art Director at ILM and ITP 06 Judge: "My eyes were really opened when this top-level digital game art was seamlessly discussed in the context of broader Art History trends. I consider events such as ITP as some of the first steps in blurring the lines between game art and fine art." **NAG**

SKY HIGH

Cast: Kelley Preston, Michael Angarano, Kurt Russel

Director: Mike Mitchell

Genre: Action

Rating: PG

A TEENAGER STARTS HIS FIRST term at superhero high school, except he hasn't discovered his powers, if any, and is assigned as a sidekick. The problem is that his parents are the two greatest superheroes alive.

The Movie: *Sky High* is actually a lot more fun than what it should be. At its core, it's a standard, clichéd high school teen comedy, but it's covered with superheroes. If *The Incredibles* was live action, this is very close to what it would be. Some great puns are made at the expense of superhero culture, such as the mom and dad donning glasses to hide their identity. The effects are also great. You could argue that it borders on lame, but it's too much fun to watch.

The DVD: It's a Disney release, so be ready for a



bunch of trailers. There's an alternative ending, bloopers and some Disney promo material.



DAWN OF THE DEAD

Genre: Horror

Rating: 18

This stylish remake of the Romero classic is actually only so in spirit and stands on its own as a top contribution to the zombie genre. A group of people is trapped in a mall when the dead start walking. However, these are of the fast-running, screaming variety, and the results are much more visceral than most zombie movies before it. It's one of the horrors worth owning.

Features: A video of a day in the life of Andy, the guy across the road, director commentary and a few special features.



THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Cast: Brunner, Steven McQueen, Charles Bronson

Director: John Sturges

Genre: Western

Rating: PG V

S EVEN GUNMEN ARE HIRED to defend a poor Mexican village from a local bandit chief and his men.

The Movie: Back in the day when a plot could be summarised in one line – even though most movies today would qualify anyway – *The Magnificent Seven* hailed a change in the traditional Western. It also made stars of Steve McQueen and Charles Bronson, to name a few, and remains an iconic Cowboy movie. It's more light-hearted than the Sergio Leone movies, and like many Westerns of this calibre, it relies heavily on the main characters. When you have seven of them, it can either work or fail. It worked so well that the movie became a template for action productions years after.

Bonus Features: Most of the main cast and crew are dead by now, but there is still a lot



to tell about the movie. Commentary by surviving cast and producers goes well with the Making Of documentary, as well as all four of the movie series' trailers. With the surviving original cast being used in making these, it's as good as you can expect from a movie over forty years old.

WILD AT HEART

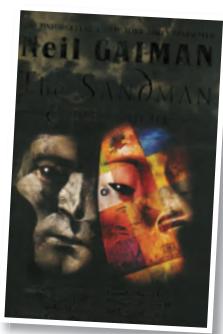
Genre: Thriller

Rating: 18

If you enjoy David Lynch's work such as *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*, this is a good look at him in his heyday, wired with weird montages and weird imagery that pale his later work. *Wild at Heart* is a prelude to movies like *True Romance* and *Natural Born Killers* and the cast is really willing to go the distance. Since this is vintage Lynch, they really have to work for their supper, and the audience is also not spared. Like we said, it's David Lynch – you either love him or hate him.

Features: No commentary in this Collector's Edition, but there are plenty of features to keep fans happy.

comics/manga



Sandman: Endless Nights

Vertigo, Trade Paperback, R154.95

For those who have read Sandman, the Endless Nights will give you an idea of how each of the endless came into being, and a further insight into the universe of the original series. For those who have not had the pleasure, here you will find mythologies you almost know, and archetypical characters like Death and Desire in forms you could never imagine. However, after you have read it, you will never be able to visualise these things in any other way. Here are seven stories, one for each of the siblings that are the root of all we know and all we feel, and even the end and the beginning of our existence.



Boogiewoman

Seven Seas, Manga Paperback, R116.95

At first, all Keiji was worried about was that his girlfriend had stood him up, even after he saw the strange black-hatted man who had berated the police for not showing humanity to a troubled wanderer. What made Keiji really feel bad was that Miyashita didn't even show any sign of remembering that she had missed their date. Then the dark figure reappeared, telling Keiji that his name was Boogiewoman, a superhero of sorts who had emerged from the physical form of Miyashita to stop an ancient evil that was hiding in the school. So, not only is your girlfriend ignoring you, but she's part-timing as a male demon hunter? How much worse can the day get?



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MORE VALUE FOR MANA

THIS MONTH, WE TALK about *Magic: The Gathering*, again. With the recent release of *Coldsnap* breaking the usual cycle of Magic expansion releases, we find ourselves in a fast-paced glut of new cards. Moreover, as has been the case since the birth of the game, new game mechanic keywords have been introduced in this set: recover and ripple.

...AND BRING FRIENDS!

Although the idea of copying spells (and other objects) has been an ongoing theme in *Magic: The Gathering* for quite some time, it seems that it is being revisited, in various forms and with increasing regularity. Are Wizards of the Coast finally running out of ideas, perhaps?

One of the oldest examples of copying is classic card 'Fork', which allows an instant to be copied, along with 'Clone', which allows a creature to be copied. Other examples are not very thick on the ground, until sets that are more recent. 'Mirari', from *Odyssey*, is an artifact that allows sorceries and instants to be copied, and the following block brought us the 'storm' mechanic, which allowed certain spells to be played in flurries. More recently, in *Mirrodin* we saw the powerful 'Isochron Scepter', which turns a cheap instant card into a recurring nightmare, and 'Sculpting Steel', an artifact that copies other artifacts.

The Kamigawa block brought us comparatively few such effects, but Ravnica presented the 'replicate' mechanic, which allows each spell to be played multiple times by paying extra mana, and the Guildmage that copies cheap sorceries and instants, as well as a new artifact capable of mimicking others. Well, with *Coldsnap* Wizards have once again provided another take on copying spells, although 'copying' isn't quite right in this case. The 'ripple' mechanic rewards players who play multiple copies of spells by having them reveal several (usually, at this point four) cards from the top of the library, and playing them for free if they have the same name as the played card. (Sick thought - how about 'Thrumming Stone' and 'Relentless Rats'?)

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

Another theme that allows us to get more than one use out of a card, and which has been with us strongly since *Magic*'s inception, is graveyard recovery. Perhaps the best-known example is 'Raise Dead', but other cards are legion, and include every card type possible: sorceries are the most common, but instants also abound. Some creatures provide retrieval services, as do some

artifacts and enchantments, and even a couple of lands exist that can revive the fallen. So this concept is by no means new, and has resulted in players not only making use of cards that resurrect their assets, but also of cards that deny opponents that ability, a category that is only slightly less prolific.

The new 'recover' mechanic provides players with cards that can return to the hand from the graveyard if a specific cost is paid when a creature card is put into the graveyard from play. The possibilities are overwhelming... 'Grim Harvest', 'Eternal Witness' and a suitably ominous sacrifice engine, anyone?

IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF TIME...

Soon enough, a new block will be launched, *Time Spiral*. Pre-release events will be taking place on 23 September, and the set is being officially released on 6 October. Meanwhile, for several weeks now, Wizards of the Coast have been running polls to allow players to influence the design of the next Core set, *10th Edition*, which is expected to debut within the next couple of months.. **NAG**



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GAME OVER

EPILOGUE CAPTURE THE NAG

IT ALL CAME DOWN to the final round. Blue took the first round after a bloodbath match in Q3CTF1, while Red fought valiantly for the win in the second round on Q3CTF2. The third round, 5-flag capture limit, 20-minute time limit with friendly fire on, was the deciding round.

It was an intense match that ebbed either way for most of the round, with the Red offensive constantly pushing forward over the water, while the Blue offensive kept harassing the Red defenders. In the end, Blue took the win and emerged victorious! The first NAG Office Capture the Flag was a booming success and remained talked-about for the rest of the day.

There is much to be said for a good CTF match, though usually this is preceded by strings of expletives when the Red Flag has been taken just as the Blue Flag has been returned. There was also much to be said about the best-laid plans of mice and men, as Red discovered despite cute hand-drawn maps and whispered strategies.



You can find the *Quake III* recordings of the CTF rounds on the Cover DVD, though all the recording was done from a single POV. If anyone knows of a way to take a *Quake III* recording and 're-edit' it to show from multiple POVs or such, feel free to do so and send us the result – you may win yourself a prize.



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The enemy has your flag! DOH!

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